

WOMEN IN PAID DOMESTIC LABOUR
IN CHRISTCHURCH

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J.R. Watt
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A B S T R A C T

This study of women in paid domestic labour looks mainly at the influence of a system of capitalist patriarchy on the lives of working-class women. The historical situation of women in New Zealand is studied in depth and compared with their situation today.

The women interviewed for the study are all currently involved in paid domestic work. The interviews are used to illustrate the nature of the work these women do. These quotes are also used to illustrate the influence of class and patriarchy in today's society.

CHAPTER ONE - GENERAL INTRODUCTION

"For a long time I have hesitated to write a book on women. The subject is irritating, especially to women; and it is not new. Enough ink has been spilled in quarrelling over feminism, and perhaps we should say no more about it". 1

*Simone De Beauvoir
The Second Sex*

Certainly it is true that the so-called problem of women has been discussed, argued about and 'solved' in a variety of ways, especially in recent years. And now many women following academic pursuits try to deliberately avoid the subject, which has been approached by so many different people in so many different ways that a fresh perspective is difficult to discover.

One aspect of women's studies has, however, only very recently been part of the general academic discussion, and that is housework. Long stigmatised as trivial and boring, housework or rather who does it and why, is now being recognised as an important contributing factor to the position of women in today's society. A woman who takes sole responsibility for the care and maintenance of her home and family is restricted in her choice of career, and to some degree her ability to follow that career to the fullest extent is also restricted. The influence of this female responsibility has been widely recognised by many writers including Marx, Engels, Oakley, Malos, Hartman² and many others.

Another area of study recently being given a lot of attention is the problems of women in paid work. The characteristics of women's work, the sorts of jobs they do and the typical female working life, as opposed to the home life, have also come under a great deal of scrutiny, for example the studies by Ruth Cavendish of women working in factories³, or Susan Shipley's investigation of women's employment and unemployment in the New Zealand setting.⁴

It is of note, however, that despite all this interest the two areas of concern have never been combined in a study of women working as domestic servants or 'home help'. This thesis, then, attempts to fill the gap in women's studies by combining the work of those who have studied unpaid housework, with the studies of women in paid work outside the home. As more and more women are working outside the home, more and more housework is becoming socialised. Restaurants, laundries and tailor-made clothes have taken over some of the traditional housewives' duties. Most of the workers in these industries, however, are women. This implies that increased independence for some women is bought at the expense of others. Domestic servants are one group of women who are lightening the load for middle-class working women and it is important to understand their role and the effect it has on their lives. It seems that liberation and independence for women is in fact liberation

and independence for middle-class women, and that this liberation and independence is being provided by working class women at the cost of their own freedom and self-reliance. A study of the sort undertaken here can help to understand the predicament of these working-class women, which is important if the problem is to be dealt with effectively. Women working as domestic servants were chosen for study, rather than women working in restaurants, laundries and clothing factories for two major reasons. The work these women do is tied very closely to their role as wife and mother in their own homes, more so than work in factories, and these women are working in isolation, with no contact with other employees, but in close contact with their employers. They are also one of the few working groups which are not protected by a union or similar organisation. This is a result of their isolation, making it very difficult to organise them. Because of their special situation, then, I felt this particular group of women would repay close study.

In attempting to combine the studies of unpaid housework with studies of women's paid employment use has also been made of the insights of the socialist-feminist writers such as Barrett, Weinbaum, Rowbotham and Sargent.⁵ Of especial importance is the essay by Iris Young in Sargent's book.⁵ The analysis of the system of capitalist-patriarchy provided by this work is very helpful to those attempting to

examine the position of women in today's society.

The base of my research consisted of a series of in depth interviews with a number of women working as 'home help'. I felt that the best way to study women in a certain situation was to find them and to ask them what their lives are like.

In all, eight women were interviewed, for an average of about two hours each. I felt it was preferable to get the full richness of detail which could be provided by a small number of intensive in-depth interviews, rather than collect a lot of surface information from a large sample. The detail provided by the technique of intensive interviewing is by far preferable as a base for research of this nature - a fact which has been fully discussed in much of the early feminist literature. The research technique also has the advantage that it allows time for a full development of the theoretical problems of a research topic, in this case the theory of capitalist-patriarchy. It is only through the detailed theoretical examination that this research technique allows that one can best uncover the fundamental forces behind a given social situation and it is this understanding that leads to effective change.

One of the initial problems was to find women working as domestic servants. Many women are working for cash and operate on a one-to-one basis with their employers. There is no union or other organisation for them so personal contacts were the only way to find them. In fact personal contact, rather than contact through a common occupation, is

the way most of these women know each other, and their employers so it is the best way of contacting them. Another factor which needed to be taken into consideration was that some of the women work to supplement social security benefits and so would possibly be afraid of being questioned about their jobs.

Personal contact through friends yielded two women, who then furnished names of friends of theirs who also work and so a web of personal contacts was developed. In fact, finding the women through this 'web' had certain advantages. I could establish a trusting relationship with the women, because I came to them with an introduction from someone they already knew. Also they had more confidence that the information they provided would not cause them any problems with either the Inland Revenue Department or the Social Welfare Department. I also placed heavy stress on the fact that pseudonyms would be used to protect the confidentiality of the information. In one case an employer provided the introduction, and this led to a certain amount of tenseness in the interview which was lacking in other interviews. In all cases the interviews were conducted in the women's own homes, which tended to provide a relaxed atmosphere. The interviews were able to develop as conversations, and provided a wealth of detailed information. All the women were very interested in the study and the reasons for its undertaking.

Among the eight women, there is quite a range of life styles. Four of the women are married with children, while the rest are solo mothers on a social security benefit. Most of the women are working alone and on a one-to-one basis with their employers, as is typical in this type of employment. Two are working within organisations, which provides some security but also involves some problems of its own. One example of this is that the hours are less flexible than in private employment, but the wages can be higher and job protection is better. The ages range from early thirties up to late forties, with most being in their mid-thirties. The number of hours spent working ranges from three up to nearly twenty hours each week, with the average being between ten and twelve. Some of the women hold advanced qualifications and some are engaged in studying other skills, while others are not qualified at all. However, all have some experience in other work and one or two have hopes of getting into better paid or more interesting work. The following are brief introductions to the women, with some biographical detail to give an idea of the different characters of them. All the names used are pseudonyms, chosen at random.

RACHEL is a fully qualified teacher who taught for several years before taking an eight-year break to bring up her two small daughters. She is divorced and on the domestic purposes benefit. She works three hours every Friday morning and is paid \$5.00 an hour. She has a high awareness of women's issues and is annoyed by attitudes

which claim that women should be solely responsible for the maintenance of a home and family. Rachel doesn't enjoy her job and is hoping to get back into full-time teaching in the future.

SUSAN is married with three children. Before her marriage she was a shop assistant, and since becoming a wife and mother she has done an increasing amount of paid domestic work. She works between sixteen and twenty hours each week. Some of this time is spent cleaning at a golf club, while the rest involves working in other people's homes. She is paid \$5.00 an hour in most of her jobs. She has some waitressing experience and also worked for a time as a tupperware saleswoman. Susan says she 'does not mind' her job, as it allows her time to care for her family which she regards as her first priority.

TRIXIE is a solo mother with two children. She has a degree in English literature which she got by studying as an adult student. She would like to get some sort of full-time position which would utilise her qualifications, but does not want to work full-time until her children are a little older. She has had several part-time and temporary jobs since her marriage. Trixie doesn't like cleaning which she has done for about eight years, but she does appreciate the money which supplements her domestic purposes benefit.

BARBARA is also a solo mother with one son. She is currently completing a degree at University. She is a trained community nurse but cannot get back into nursing on a full-time basis because the hours are irregular and she needs to look after her son. She is working about seven hours each week, but also has an arrangement with her flatmate. She does all the housework at the flat and she gets rent-free accommodation for herself and her son. Because of this she no longer needs the extra money and is hoping to give up most of her jobs to concentrate on her university studies.

CORAL works for a cleaning firm in a hospital, and has done so for eight years on a part-time basis. She is currently working ten hours every weekend. She is married with three children. She does not enjoy her work but it is relatively well paid because the Hospital Workers' Union has a good agreement. Before her marriage, and for a time after it she worked in an office but she felt she would be unlikely to get a part-time office job with hours that would fit in with her family responsibilities. She would like to train as an Occupational Therapist but feels it may be too late. Coral regards her duty to her family as being of primary importance and her working life is a secondary consideration. She has had some problems with her firm and is considering leaving in the near future.

DEBRA is married with three sons, the youngest of whom is fourteen. She has two jobs which involve caring for young pre-schoolers as well as doing some housework. She especially enjoys the child-care aspects of her work. Debra was a nurse-aid before she married and since then has held a cleaning job at a local school. She moved, with her family, to Christchurch from a small rural town and is finding her jobs a useful way of meeting new people and filling in her time in a strange city. She enjoys her work because she is used to housework and is competent at it. She is considering returning to nurse-aiding when her family commitments are less pressing.

ELEANOR is a solo mother with one child at home and one child living away from home. She works with the Nurse Maude Association which provides home help for chronically ill people through hospitals and the Social Welfare Department. She did shop work before she was married but has always hoped to get into hair-dressing. She is considering taking a course to become an apprentice hairdresser. She enjoys doing adult-education courses and is always looking for something more to learn about. Eleanor has no objections to her work, but feels she would like a change. One of the major problems for her, is the fact that the people she cleans for are ill, and she finds this depressing at times.

FRANCINE is married with one daughter who has just started school. Her husband is a builder with an irregular income, so Francine's money is needed to pay the day-to-day expenses of the family. She works about six to eight hours each week as a domestic help, but also does some gardening with a friend. Gardening is more enjoyable for her than housework and she is hoping to give up her housework jobs soon. At the moment the hours fit with her child's needs. She used to have a job as a postie which she enjoyed very much, and she would like to get back into this type of work.

Each of these women were interviewed for about two hours, and the interviews were taped. These tapes then provided the raw material for the thesis. I found there are four main themes to consider when discussing women working in paid domestic labour. The problem of class has already arisen. Earlier I said that the freedom and independence of middle-class women is being bought at the expense of the freedom and independence of working class women. It could be said that all the women working in paid domestic labour are working class, and suffer because of this. However, there are certain theoretical problems which arise when talking of women's class and these need to be looked at more thoroughly. Theoretical problems also arise when considering the question of gender and the influence it has on a person's working life. The effects of a patriarchal society on women's lives are far reaching and need to be considered in detail.

Another major theme is the special nature of women's work in a capitalist-patriarchal society. The women provide a wealth of detail on this topic with their descriptions of their jobs and their feelings about the work they do. The final factor to consider is the way women react to the forces within society - their methods of coping with their situation as well as their methods of fighting back when the situation becomes too difficult.

In the next chapter I will look at the existing theoretical discussion on class and the forces of patriarchy as these influence women at work. Most of this theory looks at the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Britain, and the effects of this transition on women. However, although this theory can provide some valuable insights, the situation in Britain is not the same as the New Zealand experience. In feudal and in post-capitalist Britain, women had contact with other women, through the village life, and later through their work in the early capitalist factories. Also women, both married and unmarried have always had some involvement in waged work in Britain. New Zealand never experienced feudal society, since it was a colony, and thus never experienced a transition. In the settler society women were isolated from each other in nuclear families, often situated some distance from their nearest neighbour. After marriage, women in New Zealand

seldom took part in waged work. Because of these differences chapter three will look at the development of domestic labour in New Zealand's historical setting.

Chapter four will then provide a detailed description of the nature of the work as it is revealed by the women currently involved in this occupation. This chapter will make use of some of the literature on the deskilling of work in a capitalist society.

Chapter five is an investigation of the work of married women today, and the influences of class and patriarchy on their lives. This chapter will isolate the class and patriarchal experiences in order to clarify these and to provide detail from the interviews. It will look at the way people's acts and choices can be changed by the forces which were discussed in chapter two. The women's methods of coping with this situation, and of fighting back when necessary will also be looked at in this chapter.

The final chapter, then, will provide a summary of the thesis and, in conclusion, some judgements about the situation of women in a capitalist-patriarchal society will be presented.

I shall now attempt to establish a theoretical basis for the treatment of the raw material which will come later.

FOOTNOTES INTRODUCTION

- 1 Simone de Beauvoir The Second Sex Penguin Modern Classics
Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England 1983 P.13

- 2 See Bibliography for specific references.

- 3 Ruth Cavendish Women on the line Routledge & Kegan Paul,
London 1982

- 4 Susan Shipley 'Women's Employment and Unemployment - a
Research Report' Department of Sociology; Massey
University and the Society for Research on Women
Palmerston North, 1982 Unpublished.

- 5 Iris Young 'The Unhappy Marriage - A critique of the
dual system's theory' in Sargent (ed) Women and Revolution
South End Press, Boston 1981

CHAPTER TWO - CAPITALIST PATRIARCHY

There are four main characteristics of women's work in today's society, and all of these characteristics describe paid domestic labour as well as other types of women's work.

Firstly, women tend to be grouped into a narrow range of occupations, usually service occupations or traditional women's jobs.

Among the eight occupational groups with over 4% of full-time women workers, office work of some kind or other employed a massive 33.3%, teaching or nursing 11.5%, sales 6% and scientists and technicians 4.2%. Male full-time workers were much more evenly spread over a range of their eight occupations only two of which - teaching and clerical or related also appeared on the female list¹.

Cleaning is a typical example of traditional female service-related work.

Secondly, women are usually located in lower paid, lower status work. For example in August 1983 males average weekly earnings were \$324.73 while females made only \$236.18. The male average hourly rate was \$7.99 while the female rate was \$6.36.² Cleaning fits with this characteristic too, in that it is very poorly paid and does not enjoy high status because it is a manual and repetitive work and 'appears' unskilled.

Thirdly, women's work is often part-time rather than full-time, as this allows working to be combined with a family life where a woman has the responsibility for all the housework and child-care.

The few men working part-time were mainly young (students) or old (superannuitants). Women working part-time were spread right across the age range, but the majority were aged 20-59. One in 3 employed women worked part-time (36.7%) but only 6.6% of men.

None of the interviewed women are working full-time and all said the prospect of flexible working hours was an important reason for them accepting paid domestic work.

Fourthly, women's work tends to be less stable and secure than men's work. It is more sensitive to prevailing economic conditions, and women move more rapidly in and out of jobs.

This is reflected, in part, by the greater instability of female full-time employment, which grows more rapidly during periods of rising opportunities but falls more quickly when labour market conditions deteriorate. 4

Paid domestic labour is certainly sensitive to economic conditions since if the employing woman or a member of her family (especially a female) were to become unemployed that person would take over the cleaning lady's job.

Women's responsibilities in the home and their lack of qualifications are the major reasons for these characteristics of their employment. I am thus compelled to look more deeply at these conditions to find the fundamental forces which produce the characteristics of women's employment that I have described. Why is it that women rather than men are almost universally faced with the responsibilities of child care and maintaining a home? Why is it women who are well-trained houseworkers either have little or no other, more marketable qualifications, or if they do have other qualifications they are often unable to use them because they are responsible for their children?

Socialist feminists argue that it is the capitalist-patriarchal system which traps women into jobs with the characteristics described above. Socialist feminists found that patriarchy cannot explain the position of women fully, so they began to look at the way the capitalist system has used and changed the patriarchal system until the two have become one, that is, capitalist patriarchy.

Many socialist writers believe that before the advent of capitalism men and women were equal, and worked together in all things.

Society was agricultural, and women were involved in every kind of agricultural work, just as men were. The woman was a productive worker...Right up until the eighteenth century women worked alongside men in agricultural labour, even doing⁵ such work as sheep-shearing and thatching.

However, this view is not historically correct. Women did work beside men in many occupations, but there was also a sexual division of labour, as there is today. The difference is that the pre-capitalist sexual division of labour was not as restricting as today's pattern, and thus women were more independent in comparison with today.

In pre-capitalist society women dominated a number of crucial skills, and thus their labour and their knowledge were indispensable to the family, the manor, and the village. In many craft guilds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries women were members on equal terms with men, and even dominated some of them. Women engaged in industry and trade. Pre-capitalist culture understood marriage as an economic partnership; men did not expect to "support" women. The law reflected this relative equality of women by allowing them to make contracts in their own name and retain their own property even in marriage.⁶

This is not to say that sexism did not exist. Women were still restricted to certain areas of endeavour, and men still ran both the most important forms of authority - The Church and the State. The movement, then, has been from a position of relative independence to one of increasing

dependence, and this movement is tied in with the development of capitalism.

In seventeenth century Britain the home and the work place were one and the same. Women and men both worked and lived within the domestic setting, and women's work was seen as necessary and productive. Men's and women's work were both essential to survival and both were accorded a more similar level of status. Capitalism, however, separated the home and the work place. Since patriarchy kept women in the domestic sphere while capitalism was accepting men into the new sphere of public work, capitalist-patriarchy set the conditions for women's present situation.

With the development of the capitalist mode of production, the old, the young and women of child-bearing age participated less in economic production and became dependent on the wage earners, increasingly adult men.

Capitalism didn't create the sexual division of labour, or the identification of women with the home. But it did create a new set of social relations within which the existing patriarchal divisions were reproduced and solidified in the different relations of the wage-labour system.

This is not to say, however, that capitalism and patriarchy are totally separate problems requiring entirely separate solutions. Although they certainly began at

different times and had different fields of influence, they have now evolved into one system which affects all aspects of life, economic and cultural.

The patriarchal dynamic, located in the patriarchal family, always is expressed alongside and through the economic system of society...Patriarchy defines culture... it never exists in a vacuum, but is blended into the economic modes of life, which alter the relationship and shape the attitudes and create the ideology which protects the totality. This political definition of women as both child-bearer and rearer is used to maintain a system of male privilege which is thereby used to sustain the economic class arrangements of society.⁸

Here, then is shown the inter-action of class and patriarchy. Capitalism, out of which came classes, defined by their relationship to wage labour and the means of production, developed on a cultural base that was already patriarchal, and is thus itself a patriarchal economic system. It has altered feudal patriarchal relations to fit more easily with the needs and designs of capitalism. Thus the two systems evolved and changed until they are now one system. One can see...

how capitalism is an economic system in which a gender division of labour having an historically specific form and structure which, by marginalising women's labour, gives men a specific kind of privilege and status. Capitalism...was founded on gender hierarchy which defined men as primary and women as secondary.

Gender-division pre-existed capitalism but at a certain point took on a new form (like other parts of feudal society which were developed by capitalism) as it was changed and developed by the capitalist system. Thus did women's status change from a position of relative independence in pre-capitalist patriarchy to one of dependence and oppression in a capitalist-patriarchal society.

By the nineteenth century women's economic independence had been almost entirely undermined and her legal rights were non-existent. Capitalism thrust women for the first time in history to the margins of economic activity...women were defined as a secondary labour force which served as a reserve army of cheap labour.¹⁰

It was this nineteenth century capitalist-patriarchy which was imported into New Zealand by the first colonists. Because New Zealand was a settler-society, this imported patriarchal-capitalism had some consequences which were different to the consequences in Britain. For example, in Britain married women worked right from the beginnings of capitalism because the male wage was not high and because women were cheaper than men to capitalism. In a settler society the male wage is very high, so married women do not work. Settler women, therefore, tend to be isolated from each other, with no common meeting place. British women of this time were working in the early factories, and did not suffer the isolation of settler women. In the settler society the earliest form of

paid work for women was domestic labour which is very isolated. In Britain class interacted with patriarchy, as the working women were working class factory hands. But in New Zealand class was more submerged (hence today's claim of a 'classless' society) while patriarchy was the more dominant force.

Today the pressures of class are building up against men in that their wages are no longer large enough to support a family so that there is an increased need for married women to work, but their work choices are restricted by the capitalist-patriarchal system. The capitalist system needs cheap labour and the patriarchal system wants women to provide free child-care and husband-care, so capitalist-patriarchy alters social and economic conditions to ensure people will make choices which will serve that system. In the case under discussion this means women are pushed into low-pay, low-status, part-time, insecure jobs that use women's traditional skills.

There are other ways in which the capitalist-patriarchal system has altered social and economic conditions to ensure that its needs are being met. For example the small nuclear family is upheld as the best life-style available, because it serves certain needs.

As an economic unit, the nuclear family is a valuable stabilising force in capitalist society. Since the production which is done in the home is paid for by the husband/father's earnings, his ability to withhold his labour from the market is much reduced. Even his flexibility in changing jobs is limited. The woman, denied an active place in the market has little control over the conditions that govern her life.¹¹

Thus the nuclear family, with women taking sole responsibility for maintaining the home and family serves a need for capitalism, as well as maintaining a patriarchal division of labour. That is to say that the capitalist system makes use of patriarchy to create a social grouping that will meet certain needs of a capitalist industrialised society.

And so it is that (capitalist) industrialisation cannot co-exist with traditional family patterns and whenever capitalism thrives, so does the small nuclear family.¹²

This nuclear family also serves an important role in the consumption of goods produced in a capitalist society.

The needs of capitalism, requiring the destruction of the self-sufficient worker also required the destruction of the self-sufficient home. Moreover, the decline of the family and domestic industry and its replacement by wage-labour provided the material basis for a redefinition of the patriarchal division of public and private life into one of work and home. Women's lives, within the family, become redefined as their place in the world of work, and the actual world of work came to be defined in terms of the wage-labour process.¹³

So women, once an important productive part of a family unit which produced most of the goods and services it required, have now been reduced to a servicer and consumer. And her work is not recognised as work in the way that paid labour in the market is, because it is unpaid and is seen as part of a woman's natural function.

Because a woman's primary role is to look after the needs of her husband and family, women's paid work can be classified as 'extra'. Since it is not a central feature of a woman's life, women's work can be manipulated to serve the needs of a capitalist economy. One example of this is the use of women as a reserve army of labour which can be utilised when it is needed and ignored when it is not.

[Women]...have served as a pool of workers who can be drawn into new areas of production without dislodging those already employed and as a pool which can be used to keep both the wages and the militancy of all workers low. Whenever in the history of capitalism large numbers of new workers have been needed in new and expanding industries, it is women more often than not who fill the need... Employers have always tended to exaggerate divisions among workers in order to keep wages low and to maintain worker docility. Women have been used consistently for such purposes. Throughout the history of capitalism women have served as a ready pool of strikebreakers...capitalists consistently replaced men with women and children when they mechanised the production process.

Then once the will and expectations of the men had lowered they rehired the men and removed the women and children.¹⁴

As well as these functions women, marginalised out of the mainstream of working life by a combination of capitalism and patriarchy, form a pool of workers who can 'fill in' when other workers are not available. Once the shortage of workers has been overcome, however, they can easily be sent home to fulfil their 'natural' functions without being a burden on capital.

When labour is scarce...then women form an important part of the labour-force. When there is less demand for labour...women become a surplus labour force - but one for which their husbands and not society are economically responsible.¹⁵

Recently, this pattern has been changing. As capital tries to maintain its profit level, more and more women are being used as a cheap full-time labour force. This has led to some criticisms of the reserve army theory, which claim that it is no longer true.¹⁶ However, it can still be said that capitalism, in its use of women workers, either as a reserve army or as a cheap full-time labour force, reinforces and upholds the patriarchal social system by ensuring that women's wages are low enough to keep them dependent on men. And, on the other hand, the social system of patriarchy the capitalist system to continue working with a profit level.

Patriarchy made it possible for capitalism to marginalise women in the first place, and it is from this marginalisation that most of the benefits to capital of women's oppression stem.

Pre-existing patriarchal ideology and the traditional location of women's labour near the home initially made possible the marginalisation of women's labour, according to its secondary status.¹⁷

Capitalism, then, did not just make use of a gender hierarchy that existed.

It was founded on gender hierarchy which defined men as primary and women as secondary. The specific forms of oppression which exist under capitalism are essential to its nature.¹⁸

This basic need for the oppression of women can be seen in the effect on women's status capitalist development in the third world has had. With the introduction of modern, capitalist industrial methods women's status has declined in developing countries.

Even where capitalism enters a society in which women's work is the centre of the economy, it tends to effect the marginalisation of women's labour.¹⁹

Having marginalised women's labour capitalism then encourages and promotes a patriarchy which will ensure women remain 'in their place'. For example, the promotion of femininity and domestic womanhood which evolved over the years after the industrial revolution, has been useful in maintaining the capitalist patriarchal system. The use of sexist imagery and sexist slogans by capital to sell the goods it produces is one example of the way capitalism has promoted patriarchy which serves its needs.

In summary, then, it can be said that the capitalist-patriarchal system creates the forces which produce the characteristics of women's work outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Capitalism, in making use of a patriarchal ideology which already existed, has altered this ideology and therefore the social relations it defines so as to meet capital's own particular needs. The capitalist-patriarchal system limits women to certain occupations, encourages them to accept part-time work, and ensures that any typical women's jobs will be low paid, and have a low status. In the interviews it was clear that women who do domestic work in other's homes, and in hospitals and offices, believe they have chosen this job because it is so suited to their needs. In reality, however...

Women's choices exist within the political context of the sexual division of labour and society which defines woman's primary role as mother. The priorities of patriarchy are to keep the choices limited for women, so that her role as mother remains primary.²⁷

The primary of the housewife and mother role means women look for and accept part-time work, such as cleaning. It also means they do not often seek out training for other occupations and if they do they can be prevented from following these other occupations because of their 'family responsibilities'. So, while it seems to the women that they freely chose to accept domestic service as an appropriate job for their needs, in fact their choices were severely limited by a political, social, and economic system of capitalist patriarchy which benefits greatly from the oppression of women.

Marx, when discussing the capitalist system pointed out that it contains the seeds of its own destruction. This can also be said of the capitalist-patriarchal system, which contains certain contradictions. For example the capitalist-patriarchal system reinforces the wife-mother role for women, while at the same time the capitalist can see women as potential producers in exactly the same way that men are. So on the one

hand society reinforces the feminine role, while on the other hand it tries to use women to increase capitalist profit by using them as full-time workers. It has been shown that women are worth more to capitalism as workers, than as unpaid workers in the home, since they can be replaced in the home by bought services.²¹ However, patriarchy tries to ensure that every male has a woman to be his constant servant. This is just one area where the two components of capitalist-patriarchy are in conflict. Women are caught between these two roles, trying to be both wife/mother and worker. In the attempt to enforce these dual expectations, the capitalist-patriarchal system has pushed women, who do not have the time and energy to successfully fill both roles, into a position where they are challenging the system which puts all these demands on them.

The clash between dependent wife/mother and independent woman worker has had implications for the patriarchal family which has proven so useful to capitalism...

...to the extent women have taken seriously and internalised the individualist values of bourgeois society for themselves, they are in conflict with the patriarchal relations of the family which define them as being dependent rather than as an independent being. This antagonism becomes amplified when women seek jobs and are still faced with the responsibilities of a family and household which are organised in terms of a system of male privilege.²²

So women, drawn into the labour force by a capitalist system which sees them as cheap labour, begin to question why they should be solely responsible for the upkeep of the home and family. As they become aware that males can no longer provide for the household and that their wage is needed to provide adequate food, clothing etc. so women become aware of the ownership of a small amount of power which can be used to wrest some concessions from privileged males. An example of this is the demand for wages for housework which is, in effect, a demand that housework be recognised as necessary labour. This is coupled with a demand for more independence for women who are held in a position of dependence by the fact that their household duties prevent them getting full-time well paid jobs which would allow them to be financially independent. In using women in the wage labour-force capitalist-patriarchy has eroded...

The material basis for the family as an institution and drawing women into wage work, capital has been eroding the material basis for that form of oppression, and it now finds itself faced with demands for setting up the preconditions for equality, such as nurseries, to which it cannot hope to accede, and with demands which, if seriously pursued, could threaten women's role as a cheap labour force [or rather their role as servants for men]. Thus again the labour process of capital is producing its own opponents.²⁹

Employing women in wage work, in addition to the effect on the patriarchally organised family, is also raising demands for better working conditions and better pay as they cease to be isolated from other working women and organise as a group. For those women treated as a reserve army of labour, there is a special bitterness in being at a level of independence when they get a job, only to have it snatched away when they are no longer needed, and told to go home and look after their families. Women providing full-time cheap labour also recognise that their wage is not enough to give them full independence, and they too will begin to make demands for more money as they come to realise that their husbands need their money and, in fact, two people are supporting the family.

Thus the capitalist-patriarchal system, in using women in waged work is creating several difficulties for its proper functioning. The major problems are that it...

widens the possibility of economic independence for women without making this fully or permanently achievable, it shortens the time available for domestic work without providing an alternative basis for it; it breaks down the isolation of women without lightening the burden of her private responsibilities.²⁴

The capitalist-patriarchal system has, of course, fought back on these issues. Men are beginning to be aware of, and take over, some household tasks, and it is becoming legitimate to hire someone to do this work, although this in turn creates the problem of middle class women gaining at the expense of working class women. There has also been some shift in the ideology of capitalist-patriarchy. For example women's place is still in the home but she is allowed out to earn 'a bit extra'. The wife/mother role is still the primary one, but now the role of secondary worker is becoming more acceptable. The ideal of a super-woman, who manages her time so effectively that she can meet the dual expectations of a capitalist-patriarchal system is gaining credence.

The ideological shift which has taken place since the 50s is mainly a move from 'woman's place is in the home' to the notion of woman as 'secondary earner' or 'working mother'... however women enter the labour force [meet the needs of capital] they must have their patriarchal existence reinforced in order to protect the unity of patriarchal history and hence its effectiveness. This is reflected in the sexual segregation of women in the labour force itself which simultaneously allows them into the realm of wage labour while reinforcing their inequality there and hence their role as mother. It is also reflected in the growing number of part-time and seasonal jobs which 'allow' women to maintain their double responsibilities as both wage-worker and mother.²³

In conclusion, then, it can be seen that the women working as cleaners believe they have chosen this occupation because it fits with their need to have time to care for and maintain their families. In reality, however, the capitalist-patriarchal system has limited these women's choices so that they are pushed into looking for and accepting this type of work. Evidence that this is so lies in the fact that the vast majority of women working are employed on a part-time basis, for low pay and in a narrow range of insecure occupations.

Domestic service is a prime example of these characteristics of women's work, which are all explained by the needs of the capitalist-patriarchal system. Not only is it typical of women's work, but also it frees middle-class women to serve as a cheap full-time labour force for capitalism, without creating intense strains on their home life, and the patriarchal nature of the nuclear family.

This chapter has looked at women in the capitalist-patriarchal system as it has developed in Britain since the pre-capitalist period. The situation in New Zealand, as I have said, is somewhat different because of its history as a settler-society. It has been shown that the 'family wage' earned by males to support the whole family never really existed in Britain,

and that married women have always contributed to the family income. However, this has not been the case in New Zealand where the male wage was originally high enough to support the whole family and married women very rarely worked. Recently the male wage has dropped, and this has caused an increase in the number of married women working. The next chapter will look at domestic labour in the New Zealand historical setting, and the ways in which this experience differs from the British experience.

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this.

CHAPTER 3 - THE HISTORICAL SITUATION IN NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand, as a settler society, has a different experience of class and patriarchy, to that of Britain. As a colony with much land available New Zealand was originally offered to the British as a country where a working man could own his own farm - a dream that was impossible for a large proportion of the population of Britain at the time. Wages and the demand for labour in the colony were high which meant working class men could set themselves up in their own farm, and working class women could reasonably expect to marry a man with a place of his own. This possibility meant that class antagonisms were more subdued in New Zealand than in England because the possibility of upward social mobility was so much greater. However, patriarchy was more dominant in New Zealand than in the mother country. Women, including married women, were involved in waged work right from the beginnings of capitalism in England, which meant they were more independent and less isolated than women in the settler society who did not indulge in waged work after marriage. Unmarried working class women, on the other hand did work, usually as domestic servants. In fact most of the women brought out as assisted immigrants [and who were almost exclusively working class] came with the understanding that they would become the servants for the more well-to-do colonialists.

Many of these early colonialists included:

missionaries, explorers, traders, landowners, statesmen who came from a society and a class in which it was usual to have servants. In the domestic and agricultural spheres of life, many people's material and moral comfort¹ depended on employing other people as workers.

The planners had hoped the native Maori population would provide this servant class. However, they soon found that the Maori people were...

too independent, too proud, and too assertive to become a substitute working class.²

So they had to import an honest, healthy and skilled workforce which could provide the missing servant and working classes. Thus it was that assisted immigration was offered to young, unmarried women of good character willing to work as domestic servants in the new colony. These young women, it was hoped, would also become wives and mothers, since the colony was suffering from a shortage of women. Many females, wanting to escape the conditions in England at the time and hoping for a husband and family took up the New Zealand Company's offer.

Of the 65 single women aboard the 'Woodlark' in 1874, 32 were classified as general servants and a further 13 as housemaids and housekeepers. Others were: three cooks, one governess, one laundress, one barmaid, four nurses and ten dairymaids. These women ranged in age from 13 to 34, with several in their late teens and many in their late twenties.³

NEW ZEALAND COMPANY, EMIGRATION.

THE COURT OF DIRECTORS
NEW ZEALAND COMPANY

Are prepared to assist in Emigrating to their Settlements in New Zealand,

AGRICULTURAL
MECHANICS,
FARM LABORERS,
AND
Domestic Servants

Of good character, who will assist themselves by defraying a portion of the cost of their passage.

The Directors will receive Applications accordingly, until

WEDNESDAY, the 9th AUGUST,

From persons of the above description, desirous of proceeding on these terms by the Ship

A J A X

Appointed to Sail from the London Docks on

Monday, the 4th September next.

Further Particulars and Forms of Application may be obtained at New Zealand House,

By Order of the Court,

Thomas Cudbert Harington.

*New Zealand House, 9, Broad Street Buildings, London,
26th July, 1848.*

A. ECOLES, Printer, 161, Fenchurch Street, London.

Alexander Turnbull Library

Source: Julia Millen Colonial Tears and Sweat A.H. & A.W.
Reed, Wellington 1984 Page 7

Most of these women would have managed to find suitable work quite quickly as labour was in very short supply in the colony. Unfortunately for the colonialists this high demand sometimes meant that the girls were not so carefully checked when they boarded ships. Many employers complained that the girls who were brought out were unsuitable, untrained or else had only come to search for a husband and so did not remain with their employers. Lady Broome was one such employer who complained of the strangeness and eccentricity of the girls she had working for her at the sheep station where she and her husband lived. Many of the girls had been factory workers and so suffered from an 'absolute and profound' ignorance of domestic service. They took places they fancied at enormous wages, were fetched to their new home at great trouble and cost, and turned out not to know even the basics of house-keeping. Many of these girls, who were used to the city found they did not enjoy country life and left after only three or four months.⁴

A further problem was the fact that many households could only afford one general 'help' whereas many of the trained housemaids were used to large houses with many servants, all with their own areas of responsibility. Thus they had to be retrained when they got to New Zealand, to be able to cope with a wider range of tasks than they were used to. This problem was caused, in

part, by the looser class structure. Many of the employers in these households would have been domestic servants themselves before marrying. Hence they were not of the wealthy class which could afford many servants but they needed, and could afford, one general help.

However, the servant shortage meant that some women did not get this help, and had to learn to cope without.

The general want of servants, which Mrs Godley called "one of the great miseries of human life in New Zealand" was not allowed to interfere with the pleasures of the social round. The women of New Zealand quickly learned to combine the⁵ duties of cook-general with those of hostess.

Once a 'place' was gained by the servant she could usually expect to receive between £25 and £30 per year. At the same time a male hired hand could expect up to £60 per year.

At that time [1842] labourers were earning 18s or 15s per week, laundresses much less.⁶

The wages were so low for women that most chose to marry rather than stay in service. In fact the wages were low enough so women would be dependent either on their employer or on their husband. This is an illustration of the dominance of patriarchy in a settler society which needs women to accept their role of wife and mother,

rather than have them working and being independent of males. This tendency to marry, however, exacerbated the shortage of servants to some extent, although some women did continue some form of domestic service, such as taking in laundry, after marriage.

Domestic service was a major source of employment for women in New Zealand, even into the 1900s [see Table 1]. As the table shows, the bulk of the employed female population was in domestic service or service related occupations [including cooks, washerwomen, housekeepers and maids]. In fact women employed in domestic service consistently outnumbered all other female employments during the period from 1881 to 1936, and this number of domestic servants rose by 17,287 in this period. However, as alternative employment for women became available, it became harder and harder to get girls to go into service. Most women preferred the greater freedom, better conditions and companionship of factory work, waitressing, nursing, teaching or clerical work. Domestic service became increasingly a job for married women or for older women who did not have the skills needed for other employment.

In 1921 some 26.97 percent of all those engaged in domestic service were married, widowed or divorced. In the entire female workforce the married, widowed and divorced constituted only 16.7 percent. For those who had been married or were married still but lacked other skills, throughout the period, domestic service remained the main source of employment.

TABLE 1

The composition of the Female Work Force : Selected Occupations : 1881 to 1936

	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1936
Waitresses	-	-	4,162	3,141	3,020	3,591
Hotel Servants	1,119	1,953	2,249	3,186	n.e	3,308
Boarding House Servants			1,146	2,147	n.e	n.e
Cooks	46	4	393	490	2,227	1,980
Barmaids	n.e	195	349	543	265	65
Washerwomen	493	830	864	912	627	968
Housekeepers & Maids	543	993	n.e	n.e.	5,212	5,147
	2,192	3,975	9,163	10,419	11,351	15,059
Domestics	11,975	13,826	19,189*	18,795	17,955	29,262
Dressmakers & milliners	3,658	6,602	10,299	17,322	6,868	5,019

n.e. - means no entry under this description

* There is some uncertainty concerning all of these figures but this one illustrates the general problem with the census.

Source: P. Bunkle & B. Hughes, WOMEN IN NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY George Allen & Unwin Ltd. Wellington 1980 pp 163-164

Domestic service was unpopular because it did not involve the regular hours and high wages of factory and shop work. The work was [and still is] very hard, very tiring, and isolated. This was partly because domestic service usually involved 'living in' under conditions which severely restricted the young girls' freedom, and partly because service was not unionised so did not have organised protection. In 1890 a domestic servants union was formed under the direction of Harriet Morison but ...

due to the difficulties of organising such a scattered group of workers it proved short-lived and remained much needed.

Later, in 1908, the Union which had been revived was refused registration under the Arbitration Act because domestic work was not regarded as an industrial occupation.

There were a number of reasons why a union, or some other form of protection was needed by domestic servants. The most important of these were the long hours, hard work and low pay. Added to these were the low status accorded to 'slaveys' and the constant problem of sexual harassment from employers.

The hard work came as rather a shock to most girls who entered service, often at a very young age. They were used to helping out at home, but not to the level of exploitation they experienced at the hands of employers determined to get their full money's worth out of the servants.

'I used to be like lightening. I remember one day I'd done everything and I had the lunch all ready waiting for them to come home. I found a 'Girls Own' magazine in the teenage daughter's room. I was only thirteen, and I sat in the sun on the front verandah look at it, and the woman I worked for came home.

"What are you doing, sitting there reading? I don't pay you to read".

"Well I've done everything," I told her.

"Have you cleaned up the boy's room?... And what about the kitchen cupboard that needs cleaning out?"

"I've done that", I said.

She said, "Well I'm giving you a week's notice. To come home and find you sitting on the verandah reading when I'm paying you twelve and six a week!"⁹

Often the hard work stemmed from an attitude imported from 'the old country' where servants were expected to perform unending and arduous duties to earn their board and a small amount of spending money. For example, this was the experience of a fourteen year old girl at her first job as a kitchen maid:

"Kitchen maid's duties - rise at five thirty (six o'clock on Sundays) come downstairs, clean the flues, light the fires, blacklead the grate...clean the steel fender and the fire irons, clean the brass on the front door, scrub the steps, clean the boots and shoes and lay the servants' breakfast. And all this had to be done before eight o'clock. The things that were written down to do after breakfast throughout the day,¹⁰ well, I'd never seen such a list in my life".



*Housemaid. Westminster Bridge Road.
Taken 1861.
Ambrotype by an unidentified
photographer.*



*Maid of all work. Westminster Bridge Road.
Taken 1861.
Ambrotype by an unidentified
photographer.*



*Maid of all work. Dartford. Taken 1861.
Ambrotype by an unidentified
photographer.*



*Servant c. 1856-61.
Ambrotype by an unidentified
photographer.*

source: Michael Hiley

VICTORIAN WORKING WOMEN : PORTRAITS FROM LIFE

In order that the employer might extract the maximum labour possible the work from the servant often involved very long hours. This was frequently a reason for girls giving up domestic service in favour of work where the hours were regulated. For example one girl went into a dress-maker's shop because of her experience working as a domestic servant for up to sixteen hours a day.

I commenced work at six-thirty and left off at eleven p.m. and was working all the time, either ironing or sewing or something after the ordinary housework was done. I was well cared for but I objected to the long hours. I consider the mistress of the house should assist and so lighten the work. I have been in service at four different houses and three of the mistresses were tyrants. I consider the hours of domestic servants should be regulated the same as those of lumpers on the wharf...the work should be reduced so as to make the hours less.¹¹

These long hours also stemmed from the British tradition where a servant lived in, and every single hour belonged to her employer. Her days off were very rare and at the discretion of her employer who also decreed the time of night the servant was expected to be in by.

"I was to have one afternoon and evening off from four o'clock to ten o'clock, and alternate Sundays' off, the same hours, and I was never to be in later than ten o'clock under any circumstances...my spirits sank lower and lower. I felt I was in jail at the finish".

The pay in domestic service, despite the long hours and hard work, was not very high. Because the work was done by women who were not expected to have to provide for

themselves, the pay could be lower than an average male's wage - this was despite the fact that many married women were providing support for their husbands and families, especially during the years of the depression when unemployment was very high.

Wages for women and girls were, as in all fields of employment, lower than those of men, and even full-time work did not provide young people or single women with complete independence.¹³

Girls of thirteen went straight from school into domestic service, and worked very hard for very low wages. A good children's nurse, as the Hawke's Bay Herald of 6 January 1930 shows in an advertisement in the Situations Vacant column could earn £1.15s a week. That was high pay at the time, but in the same issue women's shoes were also being advertised at £1.17s.6d. a pair.¹⁴

These pay rates highlight the strength of the patriarchy in New Zealand, which did not allow women to earn enough to permit them any independence. Women had to rely on a male, either a father or a husband, in order to survive.

In Britain it was common to assume that because a servant was getting her room and board she did not need to get a high wage. Often, however, the 'room' consisted of a small attic bedroom, shared with another maid, the board of 'nourishing' unappetising meals, and a couple of unattractive uniforms. It is not suprising that servants occasionally felt hard-done by.

Mrs Clydesdale thought only about our nourishment, so we used to have things like herrings and cod and stews and milk puddings, but none of these nourishing foods ever found their way upstairs... I just couldn't help thinking of the unfairness of life..."After all," I said "Don't forget, Mrs McIlroy, our board and our lodging is part of our wages. The two pounds a month that I have in money is supposed to be supplemented by the board and lodging. If the lodging is of the kind that Mary and I have in that attic, and the food is meagre, and the outings are so small," I said, "How are we getting an equitable wage?"¹⁵

The problems of hard work, long hours and low pay did not decrease over public holidays, as in most other forms of employment. In fact just the reverse was true. Housework always increases during feasts and festivities and as a result the work of the domestic servant increased as well. One servant describes her days before Christmas. She managed to get about four hours sleep on Christmas Eve and about five hours on the nights building up to Christmas - on top of a full day's work. On the 23rd December she 'got up early' and put in a full day preparing food and cleaning the house in readiness for Christmas Day. She went to bed at midnight, but got up again at four to light the fire and get the pudding boiling again. She then returned to bed 'till after six'. On the day before Christmas she was up at six and...

cleaned a pair of boots and lighted the fires upstairs - swept and dusted the room and the hall, laid the cloth for breakfast and took it up when the bell rang - put the beef down to roast - clean'd the knives - made the custards and mince pies - got the dinner up - clear'd away after and washed up the scullery - clean'd the kitchen tables and hearth-made the fire up again and filled the kettle-made the coffee - wash'd myself a bit and put a clean apron on and give the waiters the coffee and milk as they ask'd



All on a Washing Day.
Albumen print by O. G. Rejlander,
c. 1854-6.

Source:

Michael Hiley

VICTORIAN
WORKING WOMEN
PORTRAITS
FROM LIFE

Gordon Fraser
London 1979
p 127



Servant. Lambeth. Taken 1861.
Ambrotype by an unidentified
photographer.



Maid of all work. City. Taken 1856.
Ambrotype by an unidentified
photographer.

for it...after supper was over the Master had the hot mince pie up wi a ring and sixpence in it - they had good fun over it, cause Mr Grant got the ring and a young lady the sixpence - we had no fun downstairs, all was very busy until 4 o'clock and then to bed.

Even on Christmas day Hannah got up at eight and worked til the early evening when she had...

such a headache and felt so tired and sleepy - sat in a chair and slept till five.¹⁶

Christmas, besides being extra work also often brought home the degradation of domestic service.

On Christmas Day after breakfast all the servants had to line up in the hall...then we had to file into the drawing room where all the family, Mr and Mrs Cutler, and the daughter, and the grandchildren were assembled complete with Christmas smiles and social welfare expressions...when we got to the Christmas tree we deferentially accepted the parcels that were handed to us by the children, and muttered, "Thank you, Master Charles, thank-you Miss Susan". Oh I hated it all.¹⁷

Often this low status and the deference of a servant's position led to women seeking alternative employment. This was especially true in the later years, leading up to World War Two. During the war years women found they could easily get factory work, when they were not in competition with males, and as a result very few went in for domestic service.

Colonial girls were becoming too independent to accept the subservience entailed in a servant's position. Small numbers began to invade masculine strongholds in banks, post offices and business offices where women were noted to be remarkably facile with a new instrument, the typewriter.¹⁸

After the war, when many women lost their jobs to returning servicemen they refused to return to domestic service because of...

long hours, dark ill-equipped kitchens, unhealthy sleeping rooms, poor pay, petty tyranny of little minds and above all the consciousness of inferior status...which had become intolerable after the experience of the greater freedom of factory life.¹⁹

Another problem endured by domestic servants was sexual harassment by employers. It is difficult to say how wide-spread this was as most cases would go unreported. However, in most accounts of domestic service, sexual advances by employers appear in one form or another. Therefore, it is probably safe to assume that the problem was a common one for most domestic servants. In some cases the harassment was less serious, and met with derision from the maids.

He would inveigle one of the maids into his bedroom late at night when they were wearing their hair in curlers. Then she'd sit on his bed while he fingered her curlers, that's how he got his pleasure...Among ourselves we used to make fun of him, and, when Mrs Bishop wasn't around, wouldn't give him the respect that we would a normal employer.²⁰

At other times it was more serious and could lead to the loss of a job.

Her name was Dora and she'd been a housemaid with Mr and Mrs Bishop many years ago. There was a son of the house who seduced her, got her into trouble and landed her with a baby. As soon as Mrs Bishop heard of it, although she knew it was her son who was responsible, she dismissed Dora without a reference. So as well as the stigma of an illegitimate child, she had no money and no chance to get another job.²¹

Often, an advance by an employer was frightening and upsetting for young girls. In a society where girls were 'protected' from knowing anything about sex, they were unable to fight back when an employer made what would today be considered 'a pass'.

He said, "Would you like your wages doubled?" "Are you going to give me a rise?" I asked. He said, "No, but if you get on the bed with me, I'll double them". I got out of there as quickly²² as I could. I went home and I told Dad.

Sometimes rather than seducing a girl, or attempting to seduce her, an employer would resort to rape, knowing that a domestic servant would not be able to get another place without a reference, and she was usually dependent on the money from the job she had. The employer could use his position of power to rape a girl, secure in the knowledge that she would not dare report him.

He was holding my arm behind my back with one hand and pulling at my pants with the other. I was struggling to free my other arm, pinioned between our bodies. "Don't fight m'dear. All the girls love me. Servants should be obedient to their masters. I've had every girl who ever worked here."²³

The employer believed that the servant belonged to him and should therefore meet all his wishes. It was this attitude, as much as the problems of hard work, long hours and low pay, which made domestic service a decreasingly popular mode of employment. As factory, clerical and shopwork were becoming available for women, the number of domestic servants dropped remarkably, until today there are very few live-in servants, and domestic labour on a daily basis is only used as a last resort by most women.

Today's domestic servants continue to suffer from some of the same problems experienced by their earlier counterparts. The introduction of labour saving devices in the home and the gradual predominance of live-out domestic labour decreased working hours substantially, however. Not living in also solved the problem of sexual harassment since the women were no longer so vulnerable to employers' advances. In later years women also had greater economic freedom, which also made them less likely to submit to sexual advances.²⁴

In fact domestic service has undergone a transformation. It has gone from being a skilled full-time job for young unmarried women and it is now a job for married women with no qualifications looking for part-time work. However, today's domestic servants still suffer from low pay, low status, and very arduous work. The work does still not provide complete independence for the women doing it. In fact the women interviewed in the course of this research regarded their earnings as supplementary to other incomes - either a social security benefit or a husband's wage. These workers are still not, in the main, protected by a union since many of them are working on a one-to-one basis with their employers and often are working illegally in that they are not paying tax or declaring their income to the Department of Social Welfare.

So, domestic labour in New Zealand has a long history which stems from the class structure in England before colonisation took place. Many of the original immigrants were brought out specifically to provide a servant class for the wealthier classes who were already settled here. These women were also expected to provide wives and mothers since the colony had a high number of men and a shortage of women. As the women married, however, the demand for servants exceeded the supply available. This meant that most girls had no problem getting work, and also that the urgency of

the need led to less suitable people being chosen as immigrants.

Because early New Zealand was a settler society the problem of class was more subdued, as the possibility of getting a place of their own existed for the majority of people. However, the proliferation of small families, and the high wage available for men meant that married women didn't work and so were isolated from each other. Domestic service, the main employer for unmarried women, was also isolated work. Women in the settler society were separated from each other and subjected to a dominant patriarchy. Today's domestic servants are also isolated from each other, doing hard laborious work for little pay. They have been pushed into their situation by the forces discussed in the previous chapter. Chapter five will look at the effects of these forces on women in today's society. First, however, chapter four will look at the nature of domestic labour today to show the extent to which it is the same type of work as colonial servants did, and the extent to which it differs. The women's experiences as they were described in the interviews are used to explain the nature of domestic labour today.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 3.

1. Julia Millen COLONIAL TEARS AND SWEAT A.H. & A.W. Reed,
Wellington 1984 P.1
2. Julia Millen Op. Cit. P.1.
3. Julia Millen Op. Cit. P.10.
4. Lady Broome COLONIAL MEMORIES Smith Elder & Co Ltd.
London 1904 pp 208 - 210.
5. Helen Simpson WOMEN OF NEW ZEALAND Department of
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6. Julia Millen Op. Cit. P.39.
7. Bunkle & Hughes (eds) WOMEN IN NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY
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8. Dunedin Women's Collective NEW ZEALAND HISTORY
1978 John McIndue 1977 March 19-25.
9. Eve Ebbert VICTORIA'S DAUGHTERS A.H. & A.W. Reed,
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10. Margaret Powell BELOW STAIRS Peter Davies London
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12. *Margaret Powell BELOW STAIRS Op. Cit. P.36*
13. *Julia Millen Op. Cit. P.130.*
14. *Eve Ebbert Op. Cit. P.52.*
15. *Margaret Powell BELOW STAIRS Op. Cit. pp.49-50.*
16. *Michael Hiley VICTORIAN WORKING WOMEN : PORTRAITS FROM LIFE
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17. *Margaret Powell BELOW STAIRS Op. Cit. P101.*
18. *P. Grimshaw WOMEN'S SUFFERAGE IN NEW ZEALAND
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19. *Margaret Bondfield in Ellen Malos (ed) THE POLITICS OF
HOUSEWORK Allison & Busby Ltd. London 1980 pp.83 - 87.*
20. *Margaret Powell CLIMBING THE STAIRS Peter Davies
London 1969 P.61.*
21. *Margaret Powell CLIMBING THE STAIRS Op.Cit P.63*
22. *Eve Ebbert Op.Cit. P.51.*

23. *Eve Ebbert Op.Cit. P.51*
24. *Stevan Eldred-Grigg PLEASURES OF THE FLESH : SEX AND DRUGS*
IN COLONIAL NEW ZEALAND 1840-1915 A.H. & A.W. Reed
Wellington 1984 P.172-175. Also see page 53.

CHAPTER FOUR : THE NATURE OF WOMEN'S WORK

This Chapter provides an in-depth description of the labour involved in paid domestic work. I will first look at the chores, as they are described by the women who do this type of work. I will then look at the enjoyable aspects of the work, the points brought forward by the women when they are explaining what they like about what they do. This will be followed by a discussion of the women's reasons for not enjoying their work, and some of the problems they experience. Finally, I will summarise the women's descriptions of their jobs and their feelings about what they do.

Before this discussion of domestic labour as work, however, I will look briefly at the literature on work processes. It is interesting to note that all the recent studies of work and work processes have not looked at the work process of domestic labour, either in its paid or its unpaid form. Braverman's¹ studies looked at the deskilling of work, but only considered work performed in the public sphere of paid labour, and did not consider the influence of capitalist work processes on women's work in the home.

Veronica Beechey has shown an awareness of this absence, but she does not discuss it at length.

the housewife's role was originally a kind of "craftswomanship" which has been degraded as the family has been transformed by monopoly capitalism; and that family has become an "internal market" for consumption within monopoly capitalism.²

Beechey does look at the problem of women's work under capitalism in her article, "Some Notes on Female Wage Labour in Capitalist Production."³ However, she does not relate her discussion to housework.

There are other critiques of Braverman's work. For example Tony Elger criticises his analysis of capital's compulsion to deskilling, and the location of that compulsion in monopoly capitalism. He emphasises the need for a historical theorisation of the capitalist labour processes, within which deskilling can be located as a tendency.⁴ Indeed, since Braverman's original work there has been a wealth of discussion⁵ on the problem of work and work processes, none of which has included a discussion of women doing housework, either as paid or unpaid workers.

Despite this lack of study, it is obvious to most women who do it that housework is now unskilled labour. It is also obvious that this has not always been true. In early New Zealand girls were trained for domestic labour, and a trained, experienced servant was considered a prize.⁵ The lack of adequate help, discussed in the previous chapter, meant that there was always work

available for a young, unmarried female. The reason that most women needed help around the house was that housework was more arduous and time consuming than it is today. For example vacuuming a floor is much easier than sweeping it, washing with an automatic washing machine is easier and quicker than boiling up a copper and doing it by hand, and cooking on a modern automatic stove is easier than lighting a fire and getting an old-fashioned oven to the right temperature. Thus the labour-saving devices made and sold by capitalism have made women's work easier. On the other hand many chores which could be described as skilled craftwork are now provided by the same capitalist system. Sewing and knitting are now hobbies rather than a necessary part of housework, and many foods are pre-prepared which takes a lot of the skill and therefore the pleasure out of cooking. Now housework has changed from a skilled occupation to an unskilled job which any woman can do. Because of this change the work is uninteresting, carries a low status and a low wage.

I shall now turn to the ways in which the women employed to do other people's housework describe the nature of their occupation today:

Barbara : I do dusting, vacuuming, clean the bathroom, basin, toilet, washing floors, that's mainly what I do. May be some ironing, hang out some washing or bring it in, and all that takes me two or three hours.

Most of the women interviewed covered very similar tasks, working on their own in other people's houses. Two women, however (Eleanor and Coral) are working for cleaning organisations. Eleanor works with the Nurse Maude Organisation and Coral works for a cleaning firm in a local hospital. The women working in homes usually had some initial contact with their employer during which time a list of chores was worked out.

Barbara:

Initially when I go we decide what they would like me to do and usually I arrange for them to leave me a note if they want me to do something different, but normally I just go in and I've got a little routine once I get used to the job and I go as fast as I can and do the basic things and if I've got time, I'd, you know, do perhaps some extra little things that (pause) once I get used to the house I can, you know, I can see little things that might need doing and I think

right, well maybe the vacuuming's not so important this week, it's not very dirty so I might be really quick with that and I'll perhaps clean a few windows or, you know, so I'd sort of use my own initiative to a large extent.

Many of the women were given a very vague idea of what their duties were to be, and they all found they had to use their own initiative. This points to the existence of some skill in the work, since the women make their judgements on the basis of their experience, in the work. This skill is not often recognised, however, as it is obtained as a girl is growing up and is learned intuitively rather than by study as other job skills are obtained.

Trixie:

They say to me, well you know will you clean the house, and I do it. One lady said, well just do whatever you would in your own house, so if I see things that need doing I do them.

The vagueness of directions seems to stem from an assumption by both employer and employee that because the latter is female she will automatically know what housework needs doing. This assumption is based on the fact that, because housework is 'woman's work' young

girls are pushed into helping their mothers and thus get on-the-job training for years. However, because this training takes place in the home, and because females are the only people that get it, it is not visible as training and so the general image of housework as unskilled labour is perpetuated. From this image, as well as from the common assumption that all women 'automatically' know how to do housework, comes the assumption that vague directions are sufficient to give a hired houseworker. Standards vary, however, and some people have different priorities to others, and the assumption of automatic ability causes problems for some of the women.

Francine:

One lady I go to, she leaves a list of specifics which I find a lot easier, like say for Margaret's for example she, you know, she doesn't leave a list so therefore you've got to go in and, you know, you've got this big house and you've got to go around and think well, what do I, should I do, and you spend three hours doing things and then, like she might leave notes saying you missed such and such last week, whereas you might have spent three hours cleaning everything but missed that, so its very difficult to know what people really want you to do, unless they specify...

Leaving notes is a common method of communication between employer and employee, because they rarely see

each other. This often makes it difficult for the cleaner to know exactly what is expected of her, and difficult for her to explain any problems to her employer. For example Francine had left notes to the effect that she would prefer a list, but only got notes asking for 'the usual cleaning and dusting' which didn't help her.

Coral and Eleanor, both working for organisations which specialised in cleaning, and which had a large number of women working for them, don't have the same trouble discovering what is expected of them.

Eleanor:

There's a list, they have instructions on what you are and aren't allowed to do, not allowed to do ceilings, that's one thing that is strictly a no-no, and now we're told you don't get off the floor, we now just get a mop and do the walls as high as we can go because we were told not to. We don't have to spring clean at all and we don't do venetian blinds.

Coral:

There is a list, but you've sort of got to use your own discretion too because if there's one particular part that is extra dirty well you've got to make sure that looks a lot better before you leave.

However, the advantages of working within an organisation are offset by the difficulties. For example the firm that employs Coral is trying to reduce the hours each person puts in, so that they can cut down their wage bill. This means Coral doesn't have enough time to do her job properly.

Coral:

I only work Saturday and Sunday and its only for five hours each day. In the time that is allocated all you've got time to do is a quick tidy through, make sure that it's looking respectable, because they have cut our hours rather drastically, everybody's got more work to do in less hours and all the rest of it and it doesn't get a full clean at the weekends.

Eleanor finds that pressure from her patients can lead to her ignoring the list of do's and don'ts. When this happens she accepts it as part of the job, even though it is possible to get protection through the Nurse Maude organisation.

Eleanor:

Some people like their floors washed by hand and some like them washed by mop but if the home aid

is willing and you want your floor washed by hand and the home aid is quite satisfied to get down on her hands and knees and do it, its O.K. but if you get a home aid that says we're not allowed to do that then you're, the patients out of luck, so the home aid can actually stipulate what they will and what they won't do, they can actually stick to the rules. If the patient says well, you know, I think you could probably do that well they just ring the boss and say hey, you know, are they or aren't they allowed to do such and such, but, you know, not many patients do that, I wish a lot more would because they want the home aid to do other things, which can be rather nasty, but never mind it takes all sorts to have a job.

In some cases the women prefer a vague description of their jobs. They often say they would do whatever is asked of them or whatever they feel needs doing. Often, too, they claim they do not mind what they do and they make this clear to their employers. This tends to leave them open to being asked to do everything. One of the features of housework is the fact that it has no real limits or boundaries. It is often very difficult to divide chores and say one group counts as housework while

another doesn't. To a certain degree this lack of boundaries is not only because of the nature of the work, but also because of its isolation.

The physical isolation of housework - each housewife in her own home - ensures that it is totally self-defined. There are no public rules dictating what the housewife should do, or how and when she should do it. Beyond basic specifications...The housewife, in theory, at least, defines the job as she likes...who is to establish the rules, who is to set the limits, of normality if it is not the housewife herself.

For the women interviewed for this thesis, the lack of boundaries means they have to be available for all sorts of different jobs ranging from child-care, spring cleaning, and even replacing flowers to beautify a home.

Susan:

One man I go to once a fortnight and he lives alone so I wash his bathroom and his bathroom floor and his hand basins and his shower, bath, dust, polish his floor because he lives alone he doesn't do (jobs such as these are 'women's work' so a man living alone won't do them) put fresh flowers in the vase, sweep cobwebs down and that sort of thing.

Debra:

Well, I'm actually doing two different houses at the moment, both very similar, mainly dealing with children and housework, its a sort of a very maternal job. I love the children you see so it

means that I walk in the door at nine and take over from the mother and do all the duties that need to be done like bathing babies and tidying up the house and ironing, putting out the washing, dealing with the children in between times, you know, just picking them up if they need a cuddle, if they need a story you just stop what you're doing and read them a story.

Trixie:

Well, the woman in the dairy said to me did I mind making the beds or did I mind doing the washing and I said look I don't mind what I do, you can tell me whatever you like...

Not minding what they do is a common attitude amongst the women interviewed. They are aware that housework has no real boundnaries and their job is to reduce the work load for their employer in whatever way they can.

Eleanor:

So long as it's within reason I don't mind helping people, I've done dishes, I don't mind changing the sheets on beds, it just depends on what the patient can do and what they can't do.

Occasionally the job can involve some overtime because the employer needs some extra work done.

Trixie:

Sometimes Mrs Brown might ask me if I want, if I'll work a bit longer if she's having a dinner party and she might want all of her silver cleaned as well as everything else done and I couldn't get all that done on the one day as a rule so she might say oh well, stay longer, usually at Christmas time it's the same thing.

Often, however, the women stay later voluntarily to make up for time which they considered has been wasted. Often the time 'wasted' was only seen as such by the cleaner, and it was often wasted by the employer interfering in the cleaner's work and holding her up.

Susan:

One lady she does stop and talk to me a lot sometimes, I can be there longer but I just put in the time that I've talked, well I just make it up at the other end, if they give me a cup of coffee and something to eat and I'm sitting there ten minutes, well I make sure I'm longer the other end...I'd stop back, yeah, I've done that odd times but I don't charge any more for it.

If the women were protected by an organisation, like a trade union, this type of thing would not occur. In most jobs there is a regulated time schedule and if the employer interferes with the employee at work then it is the employer who pays for the 'wasted' time. This lack of protection is one of the problems of domestic labour which is rooted in its history in New Zealand. It often means the cleaner will do more than is necessary, propelled by a desire to please and a fear of losing her job. For example, often the cleaner will provide cleaning equipment without being paid, or in many cases, being asked to do this. Usually they provide their own cloths because those supplied by the employer are unsuitable.

Barbara:

I don't have to but actually I do try to remember to take my own old cleaning rags because quite often, I mean the people I go and clean for usually have got [brand name] and things like that there but quite often, oh I just, you know, I've got lots of old cleaning rags and this at home and I just, if I remember to take them I find it handier because quite often I want something a bit more substantial than a [brand name].

Trixie:

Yes, I often do that too, but I always take them away so that they won't know, things like dusters or glass cloths, well I like to have old tea-towels, or something like that to clean glass with, because if you're going to do something then you might as well do it properly.

Question:

Why do you take them away so they won't know?

Trixie:

Oh, because I, this one particular place that I'm thinking about I've asked her for cloths and she buys me those (brand name) and they're hopeless and, so I use them for some things but they're just not adequate for other things so I take my own.

Eleanor and Coral, working through organisations, do not have these problems. Coral's working time is strictly regulated and she never works longer than the five hours she is supposed to. Eleanor sometimes works longer than her usual three hours either to make up for wasted time, or for arriving late. However, neither Coral nor Eleanor are expected to provide any cleaning equipment and Coral has been supplied with a smock which is laundered by the firm she works for.

Eleanor:

You can only use what's there, all we do is offer our physical energy, that's it, everything, as you say everything they want, clean rags, vacuum cleaners, they supply it and if they haven't got it there we can't do the work.

The work itself, as most women already know, is very boring and very tiring. All of the women are keeping their own homes as well as working in other people's, and the combination of the two jobs means these women spend a very large proportion of their lives doing housework. One in particular, Barbara, is living in a housekeeping arrangement while also doing cleaning for other people, which means she cannot expect help at home from the other people living in the house.

Barbara:

I've done about four hours today, two hours at one house and two hours at another. I didn't have a break in between cause I (pause) I sort of wasn't able to get to the first house until 11 o'clock and I've done from 11 'til 3. Sometimes I'd be absolutely stuffed after, you know, say three hours at one place and then perhaps having an hour when I went and did some shopping, popped home and brought the washing in and, you know, did a few things at home, and then went and

did another couple of hours I'd be, I'd be pretty worn (pause) and then probably went home and did some more at my own house and then started dinner. I'd be pretty pooped by the end of the day.

Trixie:

Well, if you've been cleaning a house or may be two houses in a day you feel very tired at the end of it, especially if you start off doing a few things at home and then you come home and do other things.

Some of the women have experience of other jobs and are aware that these are not as tiring as housework.

Susan:

If you're a shop assistant or if you're behind a counter or a factory worker you're sitting. You're busy with your hands but, a lot of this work you're on your legs, you're moving and you haven't got that lull in between customers or something have you? You're generally working all the time, see even waitressing there's times that, in between food preparation or customers or serving at tables there's times when you can have a little sit down.

Some of the work is strenuous, too, especially if it is being done, along with a number of other chores, in a block without a break.

Debra:

It is very tiring, I tackle the windows, they're quite taxing to do, or an oven or something like that, but that's not often but you know it is, and the children are demanding. I find yes, I know I've done it...and there's always enough to fill in the morning you can never walk into the house and think well there's not much to do today. There's always plenty to do, and I like to do as much as I can while I'm there.

The fact that they are being paid to do housework makes some of the women very aware of how much they do - often they try to do as much as is womanly possible in the time they have available, and exhausting themselves in the process.

Francine:

I try to do as much as I can, so I go like a bull at a gate for three hours, to try and do as much as I can and I come home and I feel a bit poofed. So I sit down and have a pot of tea and I think oh ouf, you know.

Trixie:

I wouldn't consciously spin it out but somehow the work fits the time available, Parkinson's law or something like that isn't it. And, you know you're doing it for some-one else, like today at the dairy she had absolute mountains of ironing to do and I thought when I looked at it I thought God I'll never be able to clean the house and do all that ironing today, and I thought well I have to pick Mary up from school at three o'clock and I could probably have made that last me five hours if I'd just done it leisurely but I went like hell and got it all done by 3 o'clock and I was quite pleased with myself for getting it done in that time.

As well as being tiring and boring, the work tends to be dirty. It is strenuous work, often done inside in a warm atmosphere which makes the cleaner perspire a lot. It also involves cleaning up after other people which made some of the women feel dirty. Dusting raises a cloud of dust which tends to transfer from the house to the cleaner. Often the women say they come home and feel they need to get into a shower before they can get on with anything else.

Trixie:

Even in a clean house it's still dirty work isn't it

really? I mean you're cleaning someone else's dirt, I get grubby hands and I feel hot and sticky.

Coral:

It's very hot up there because they have to have it at a reasonable temperature and of course you work up a sweat pretty quickly and that is very tiring.

Susan:

Sweeping a locker-room and it's dusty. Your feet, I feel your feet get dirty yes, and hot days I think you perspire a lot and cleaning loos and that... I come home and I think, oh I must get into the shower.



▲ This cartoon appeared in *Part-timers' Rights*, a pamphlet published by the National Council for Civil Liberties.

source: Eileen McConnell
WOMEN Batsford Academic &
Educational, London 1982
P.42.

Up until now I have given a full description of the nature of paid housework and presented it in the words of the women who are actually involved in this occupation. I have shown that the work is boring, repetitive, isolated, skilled (although it is not recognised as such), imperfectly defined, tiring and dirty. I have also shown that the fact that the cleaners are not protected by a union means they can be pushed into over-time or having their hours cut and into doing extra, such as providing cleaning materials.

However, the women have found some aspects of their work to be enjoyable. One point they all mention is the amount of satisfaction to be gained from putting effort into a job and seeing some improvement, getting some result for the labour. Many of the women say they much prefer to go into a very dirty place and clean it up because then it is easier to see improvement for the work put in.

Susan:

I think it's satisfaction that when you've gone it looks nice, just satisfaction that it's done and it looks nice for your work.

Barbara:

Sometimes I think oh well it looks, you know, it looks nicer than it did when I arrived...so there's a little bit of satisfaction.

Francine:

Oh a certain satisfaction, you know. I'll look round and I'll think oh that looks nice, I feel happy with that, there's a certain satisfaction in that, sure.

Occasionally this satisfaction can be destroyed by the employer. Either their attitude takes the pleasure out of the work or they ask for work which shows little or no result for the effort put in. To some extent the latter is part of normal housework in that it often involves cleaning things which don't look very different at the end of the labour.

Barbara:

I do like it if I see some rewards, some results, you know like if I just spent twenty minutes cleaning some woodwork, like one house I go to they often ask me if I would clean the walls and things in the kitchen, and sometimes that's something, you know, like I look at them and I think oh well they don't look very dirty to me but I clean them anyway because I've been asked to and I'm being paid very well for doing it and that's what they want done. So I clean like mad and it hardly looks any different when I've finished and I don't like that. But I love it when I go in and see crumbs all over the

floor and dead flowers and, you know, general mess everywhere and I just get into it and when I've finished it looks much better. That's a nice feeling, so I suppose the dirtier the house the better in a way.

Trixie:

The place is always in such a shambles when I get there that I take a great deal of pleasure out of, you know, getting it organised for them because I think she'll be pleased with having this done. But with my sister-in-law she's such a perfectionist and she needs everything, everything sparkling clean and she might run along the picture frames. She wouldn't do that in front of me, but I know she's capable of doing that...I don't get any satisfaction out of cleaning her house at all really...I never stand back and look at it and think oh doesn't that look nice because I don't care that much about it.

Alternatively, appreciation from the employer can often raise the level of job satisfaction considerably. One of the characteristics of working as a paid domestic aid is the very close relationship which exist between employer and employed. Because of this close one-to-one relationship, the attitude of the employer makes a great deal of difference to the job. If, then, the employer seems to appreciate the work put in by the cleaner this raises the level of job satisfaction enjoyed

by the home aid.

Debra:

They let you know, too, which is nice, some wouldn't, I think some wouldn't really mention it at all but I get a lovely thank you when I walk out the door "What would we do without you" sort of thing which is nice. You sort of come home feeling very good about what you do.

Eleanor:

They always say thanks, you know, and at Christmas time they always give me Christmas presents. Everyone you go to at Christmas time has a card and a present there for you. And that I suppose is the time you really feel the reward mostly, well I do anyway.

Many of the women point out the increase in their personal security which is gained from working. Barbara for example, enjoys the feeling of security she gets from knowing her position as live-in housekeeper guarantees her a home for herself and her son.

Barbara:

I think one good thing is that we know that our chances of staying here for much longer. We've had to shift about four times now because the

houses we've been in have, in fact we've shifted every year now for the past four years [and] it's been the same every time, the house has gone on the market and we've had to get out, whereas here, oh, I don't know I mean we're still, you know, the circumstances could change, it's still not our home but we've got a much better chance of being able to stay here for longer and it's a very nice feeling. So I know that when I make this garden up that we'll probably be here to eat the things out of it.

Financial security is also an important benefit, especially for those women raising children alone.

Trixie:

I'm grateful, every day I'm grateful that I've got the opportunity to earn some extra money and that we don't have to be scraping along because, you know, I would hate to do that. I've always been used to a sort of a reasonable standard of living and I wouldn't mind lowering my sights a bit but when I think of being without any of that money at all we would be practically destitute.

As well as the improved financial situation all the women enjoyed the feeling of earning their own money.

They have all, at one time, been dependent on a husband for finance. At present the married women are still dependent on their husbands for money, while they contribute 'extra' money. The solo mothers are all dependent on the state, through a benefit, for their basic financial needs. Because of this basic dependence all the women have a heightened enjoyment of having their own money. They enjoy the sense of independence gained from earning money for themselves, the sense that they are contributing to the family finances and the fact that they are helping their husband's cope with the bills.

Coral:

It's a bit more independence too, like if I see a pair of shoes I want I don't have to ask for any money, not that he wouldn't give it to me but it would probably be a matter of whether we could afford them and we probably couldn't so I wouldn't ask.

Debra: (discussing a previous cleaning job]

Probably the company, earning a pay, it was the first pay packet I had and possibly I was just able to earn this money and go and buy things, you know, it's a wonderful feeling if you've been at home for years, you know even if your husband's generous it's still, I feel, it's still his money coming in course now there's two pay packets coming in it's our money which we share. We're half-way

through renovating this place and it's lovely to be able to do your bit.

Debra:

If you've got a month where you've got some good solid bills to pay like the rates, the power and things, your money's a wonderful thing to have...it takes a load off your husband, it really does, it's a wonderful help. Other months you might feel oh goody it's mine. I can go and enjoy it, and that gives you a thrill, you know, so I'm sort of half-way there now, when I can enjoy it myself.

Susan:

It gets me some independence, with Christmas coming up I don't have to ask oh can I have some money for presents, you know.

As well as the financial independence, working provides many of these women with a bit of social independence. It gets them out of their own homes, and for some of the women, it also means meeting new people. As Susan says it keeps them sane.

Susan:

Actually its keeping me more sane, I don't think, down the back here, I love down the back it's so

quiet and peaceful but if I was here all day and every day I'd get bored, I think.

Debra:

I came straight up here, went straight into work and never got the opportunity to be lonely, so I never had weeks of sitting at home. I think I would of been very lonely because all the women around here work, so I think I was quite lucky to get out and about very quickly. I never got homesick for our old town or anything...
[I like] feeling useful, it's a wonderful way to feel, rather than sit at home and look at four walls.

There are other advantages to cleaning that some of the women point out. For example Trixie enjoyed being able to organise her own timetable, and the feeling of being self-employed.

Trixie:

I can please myself, I'm sort of virtually my own boss and I can make the money without being penalised by the Social Welfare Department for earning it.

Coral enjoys the freedom from worry, the fact that she can go out to work, earn her money and then forget about it until the next week.

Coral:

I don't think I could cope at the moment with something that I had to worry about, there's no worry about anything up there, you go up, you clean, and you come home. There's no worry about the work, that's the end of it, you don't have to bring it home with you.

And Debra enjoys all the aspects of her job because she sees it as an extension of her role as wife and mother.

Debra:

It's a job that I really enjoy doing, I've always enjoyed being here, cleaning everything after children and it's really just repeating itself in a way.

It is important, however, to note that many of these advantages pointed out by the women would come with any form of employment. Some of them would possibly be greater with other sorts of employment. For example job satisfaction would increase with more stimulating work, and financial security could be greater with better paid work. Any form of employment would get the women out of their homes and there are other jobs which would not

be so belated. There are many other reasons why women choose this type of employment, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Before moving on to look at these, though, I will now discuss the problems which are attendant on women working as paid domestic workers.

Some of the enjoyable aspects of the job are cancelled out by certain less enjoyable aspects. Many of the women for example mention the improved financial security which they gain through working. However, at the same time they often mention the irregularity of the work, which leads to an irregular income.

Eleanor:

Well you can't guarantee, it's not a regular nine to five office job or anything, cause if one of my patients goes into hospital I'm then without a patient, and without a job...I have set patients to do and if they go into hospital then you're without a job.

Barbara:

I don't know if you could describe it as regular income because, you know, I wouldn't go in school holidays or public holidays...it's not a set fast arrangement so I mean I couldn't rely on that income every week. There are other times too when perhaps the people I clean for don't need me...

so it's all very flexible and as far as the money goes, no. I don't think I could rely, I don't sort of regard it as regular income exactly.

Coral has problems with the firm she works for. They re-arranged the time-tables and she wound up without a permanent position. The firm then moved her around from hospital to hospital which meant she had different hours each week, and therefore different pay.

Coral:

One week I'd do six hours, the next I'd do three or something but there again they said well we're employing you and that's all we have to do. So the pay was irregular, but it's one of those sorts of jobs where you really shouldn't rely on it too, you've just got to regard it as a bit of extra. I don't think you can say well yes, I'm going to pay a loan off with that money because it's so fickle that it could be gone tomorrow, you know, I would only use it for little things, not anything large.

Although many of the women mention that they enjoy getting out of the house to go to work, often they

find they have merely swapped one set of walls for another. The interviewed women find that doing house-work for money does not change its nature.

Trixie:

Yes, I think it is very isolated working in a house, it's the same as doing it at home, but if you're at home you can have diversions, you know you can do other things. And, you know, you can say oh well I'll forget this for a while and find something more interesting, but in a place like that you don't have any alternatives and you've got no-one to talk to and no distractions at all.

Rachel:

I would hate to do it full time, because you don't have any contact with people. You might as well be at home. I mean I consider employment part financial and part getting out of the, you know, the rut of being at home.

Even Eleanor and Coral, working as part of a group of women cleaning find they spend a lot of time alone. This causes problems for both women. Coral, who was having trouble with her firm, tried to get union help to

support her. However, because the other women didn't know her she couldn't get much support.

Coral:

Each group has nothing to do with the other group, they're all under the same wing of course but nobody sort of fraternises much, then there was the union trying to come in to get support, anyhow nobody would support us so we just had to decide what shift would suit us and they did have some vacancies that they could put some of the girls into.

Eleanor found the job very lonely. She feels she can't discuss her job or any of her problems with anyone except the boss. This means if she has any problems with the boss there is no-one else she can talk to about it. The other consequence of her isolation is that she tends to get more involved with the patients and this causes some emotional strains.

Eleanor:

Once a year we get together, so you don't know them very well, but if you want to know anything then you ring the boss. Otherwise...it's a very lonely job, it's not like working in a factory where you can go down the road and have a couple of drinks with your mates. Well you can't discuss the job

with anyone other than the boss, because you don't know anybody else so it's a very lonely job...as far as the employee is concerned because any hassles at all well you've got to get in contact with the boss...you never get to see them and you don't get to compare notes. I suppose the boss sits there saying goody goody thank goodness they can't. We'd probably only get ourselves in a lot more hot water, or she would... that's probably why you get so involved with the patients...

Eleanor:

It's when they get sick it hits you the most... all of a sudden one of them will take off to hospital and it'll suddenly hit you they really are sick... that becomes rather sad, in fact two of my patients have been in hospital last Christmas and it hit me hard because it was such a shock. I've had three patients die on me but I sort of hadn't got close to them, but these two have sort of become me Mum and I've been with them about five years now, and to see them go off into hospital, I suddenly you know, it shook me up a bit. I thought yeah, I don't really like this job much...cause the patients that we go to don't get no better, they are on their way out, and that gets a bit morbid...the boss says whatever you do don't become involved, but it's very hard not to,

especially if you're with the same patient year after year.

The job satisfaction, which the women all point to as being a good part of the job was also superceded in most cases by the futility and boredom which housework involves. It is futile because nothing ever stays clean and even as the work is being done the cleaner knows it will need doing again very soon. It is boring because the job never changes. The house will have to be cleaned again, and it will be the same house and the cleaning will involve the same tasks.

Barbara:

I just sort of accept that I feel like...in my own home, that depression that oh well, it's taken me, the place looks presentable at the moment but when I'm actually at home and have cleaned up and by the end of the evening when we're all home it doesn't look a hell of a lot different than before you cleaned it up, I find that quite depressing.

Francine:

You only ever see it when it's in a mess and then you spend your whole time putting the mess in order and then you come back to a mess

again. Sure that can be a bit disheartening but that's what your job is, to come to clean up the mess.

The boredom can be fought by changing the routine, or altering the order in which the chores are done. But, despite this, the work is still boring, and this can sometimes cause the women to work at below the level they would like.

Francine:

I'll try and do things, you know, different each time, so that, you know, you don't really have a routine. Like I don't always do it in sequence, I'll do something like I'll think oh I'll do this today. Housework is pretty boring really, it's a necessary evil I suppose.

Rachel:

I think I get slower in some ways...I get bored you see, I probably reached a peak when I got faster and then I sort of levelled out cause, you know, the boredom gets to me after a while, because you're doing the same old task every time.

The women's pleasure in doing a job that they are good at, and in doing it well, is also reduced to a large extent by the nature of the job. Cleaning is generally a low status job, even when done in offices and hospitals. Indeed housework could almost be termed

a no-status job in that, because it is usually done by unpaid women in their own homes, it is not usually regarded as work. The low status attached to their work not only lowers the women's interest in their jobs, but also encourages other people to treat these women as a lower species.

Coral:

It is a bit demeaning. The nursing staff definitely think they're above us and the doctors well they just step over us. Very rarely do they speak. We sort of chalk it up if somebody speaks to you, you know.

Coral:

It could be made a lot pleasanter if other members of the staff...they don't acknowledge you, you're just the cleaner. They don't speak to you unless they have to, [there's] certainly no status with it...you ignore them too, just like they ignore you but sometimes it can be a bit hurtful.

Trixie would rather be doing some form of shop work, or different part-time work, in order to avoid the low status of the job she is doing. The only reason she sticks to housework, she says, is because she is paid 'under the table' and so doesn't lose any of her benefit because of work.

Trixie:

I'd rather work in a milk bar or delicatessen or something like that rather than doing housework...probably because it's not as demeaning. You know, you feel, it is a bit demeaning doing someone else's housework. Cleaning their toilets or picking up their dirty sox or that sort of thing...you know you don't really enjoy doing those sorts of things for other people if you have an alternative.

Many of the women are working alone in other people's houses, but some of them are working with other people around them. Eleanor's patients are usually at home while she works, and, Coral has to work around both doctors and patients. Rachel works at a house and quite often has to cope with the family in the house while she is working. Often these people get in the way as the women try to work, and prevent them doing their jobs to maximum efficiency and increase their frustration with the job.

Coral:

It is very difficult sometimes when you've got lots of doctors, you see doctors come in and see their patients well, especially on the heart ward. I have been in there, well they've got a terrible unit, heart unit in there. It's got really dreadful carpet on the thing, you're only

allowed in there when there's no doctors in there...the piece of carpet is absolutely dreadful to vacuum, it's not an easy one at all and yet, you know, you've got to try your best in there. Sometimes though if somebody's terribly sick in there [and] they won't let you in there at all, so therefore it's twice as dirty the next day.

Rachel:

It's difficult often to get into the kitchen because one of them, you know, often gets up about ten o'clock and that's often when I'm just going to start on the kitchen and he's there. They're untidy too, and open drawers and don't shut them and things like that.

Rachel has trouble asking people to move so she can get on with her job, and she feels annoyed that none of the males in the house ever notice when she needs to get into a room.

Rachel:

I guess to a certain extent I expect people to notice that I need to, you know, I find it difficult to, [pause] I feel a certain amount of conflict may arise because I'm asking them to move because they haven't noticed that I actually need to get in there,

it's basically my personality I think.

Susan finds she has to adapt her cleaning routine around people using the facilities when she's at the golf club.

Susan:

If all the women are coming in playing golf when I first get there, they're all coming in and using the loo. They're all going to the locker rooms and I can't go out and do the ladies area so therefore I do the dining room and the big lounge - the ladies' lounge where there's nobody and they've all gone out about ten o'clock out playing golf, well then I whizz round the loos and the hand-basins and the locker room and things like that.

The attitude that the women are confronted with is that the cleaners are non-people who don't deserve any consideration while they try to do their job. The cleaner is invisible to these people, and her work is only noticed when it is absent. Other employers prevent their cleaners working by distracting them. This probably stems from loneliness on the part of the employer more than from any particular attitude towards paid domestic labour.

Eleanor:

I only had one complaint with one patient, she

liked to talk to people, so I had to get the boss around to have a talk with her, 'cause I said well I'm here to do a job I'm not here to sit and talk to you...I've still got to say to her hey, you know time's running out and I haven't done the vacuuming yet, I have to get going, and she'll say oh I've been talking too much today haven't I...I'm a person who can't sort of work and talk at the same time. I talk or I work but I can't seem to combinate the two so that sort of holds me up so I don't mind sometimes if a patient says well I'm going out. I'll think well, that's good, I'll get some work done.

A further worry for Coral and Eleanor is the supervision they get on the job. Coral's supervisor comes around to check that the work is being done and if there are any problems she pitches in to help.

Coral:

At the weekend nobody comes and inspects what we do, we have a supervisor who comes round and checks that we're going alright and if we're dragging behind or somethings interrupted or we're not having a good day at all she'll buckle in and help too, although she does have other duties of her own to do...we have working supervisors not supervisors wandering round all the time.

Coral also had trouble with the firm demanding too much of her in the time available. She has developed an attitude where she simply does the best possible in the face of unreasonable demands.

Coral:

[I just say] yes I'll do that for you and then just box on as much as you can, you know it's quite unrealistic some of the things that they ask you to do. Especially if you're relying on somebody else to come and do something.

Eleanor, too, has problems with unreasonable demands. She describes cleaning out an oven at one of her patients' houses.

Eleanor:

You'll go in there and you'll feel like you want to get out the drill and they have done nothing to help you get that off, and they expect you, you've only got three hours and it can take all three hours to clean the oven. And they'll sit there and wonder why you haven't done anything else.

Francine has trouble identifying what her employer does want done. She says when she starts a job it's best to get a specific list of chores. She has trouble with one employer who asks for general cleaning then complains
_____ when certain specific tasks aren't done

Francine:

...try and get a specific list of things to do so that you know where you stand and the person knows what to expect of you, you know I think that makes life a lot easier than, you know rushing around trying to do what you think they might want done and as I say may be next week they say well you know you didn't do such and such. You know, whereas you spent a full three hours doing what you think is a good job in the house.

Eleanor's work is inspected in spot checks by supervisors but she has never been told what standard is expected of her.

Question:

Do they give you a guideline before you start as to what sort of standard they expect?

Eleanor:

No, not really it's just assumed that you know what housework is all about, although the boss, she interviews the patient before you start so if the standard improves or declines she will know.

Eleanor:

Every once in a while the supervisor will come round that's why you're supposed to do the houses and keep them up to scratch because if you

don't the boss could arrive at any time at all, and you've got no forewarning that she's coming. She'll just arrive and if it isn't done you're in trouble...actually one of them used to be a Crothels supervisor and she would run her finger along the doors and if you haven't done them you're for it.

Coral has one more negative aspect to her job. It is part of working in a hospital, and does not apply to any of the other women. Coral cleans in the psychiatric ward of the hospital and this has occasionally caused trouble for her.

Coral:

One particular case the nurse had to come in with me because the patient thought I had a knife and that sort of thing, you know, for your own protection sort of thing. That's just because I'm doing that particular ward.

In conclusion, then, how do the women perceive their situation. Most of the women have simply talked themselves into accepting that they had little or no choice. It is the only way they can earn money. But the work itself they find degrading, boring and dirty.

Trixie:

I hate it, I don't mind it quite so much now as when I first started it, I used to think well, the first lady I went to, they've got a lovely bit house and swimming pool and she used to be out there lying in the sun and I'd be thinking this isn't right, that should be me out there lying in the sun. And I used to think about other things all the time while I was doing it and I used to count the hours you know, count the time. And I'd think I'm nearly half way, now I'm half way, you know, how you do, but now I sort of think, well it's just a means to an end for me.

Susan:

Oh heck, oh yes, it's all right I suppose. I don't know if I do like [pause] oh no. I don't say I dislike it, it's a job isn't it? And I started to do it to get a wee bit extra money and I just carried on.

Francine:

Well, it's not stimulating, you know, you don't sort of get anything from it, you know. Cleaning people's furniture and floors is hardly stimulating

work, it's not a good job in that sense. But it is something I know I can do well and I don't have to think about it, you know. It's all right. I mean I don't find it does much for me.

The problem with this type of work is that it is housework, and housework is not pleasant or interesting work. Being paid to do it doesn't make the job any more palatable or interesting.

Barbara:

I just see it as tedious, boring work that has to be done...

Rachel:

I find it easy but boring. It's not something I'd recommend to anybody but it's o.k. as a job. I'm not particularly keen on the idea of cleaning, you know, cleaning three toilets and, clean up after people. I don't like that much.

To some of the women the work is acceptable because it is housework and, as they all said, all women do housework of some kind. They are all used to doing housework in their own homes and so have become somewhat immune to the worst aspects of the job. Some of the women have only gradually developed this attitude of acceptance, however. Trixie, for example, took a

little time to come to accept that cleaning is the only way she can sustain the standard of living she enjoyed while she was married. She is used to the futility of housework, but had to learn to accept the low status of the job.

Trixie:

Housework's always fairly futile really because the same things are going to need doing over and over again, and you know they're going to need doing again the next day. That's just something I've got used to over the years...it's certainly not something anyone would choose to do, it's definitely a last resort, it's definitely a last resort for me. I used to really hate it. I used to say to my mother, I don't want to do it any more, I just don't want to do it, I can't stand this. And she'd say well, you know, just tell yourself if you didn't do it, you'd be really hard up...

Now that she is used to it Trixie has a more placating attitude and has learnt to cope with things by putting herself on 'automatic'.

Trixie:

[It] might not be what you'd like to do but you don't really think a great deal about it sort of. You do it automatically.

In this chapter I have provided a detailed description of the nature of paid domestic labour. The literature on work processes in the capitalist system does not discuss domestic labour, paid or unpaid, however some of the comments on deskilling can be applied to domestic work. Certain chores, which were always drudgery have been made easier by capitalist inventions, however many other tasks such as cooking, sewing and knitting have been either made redundant or deskilled until they constitute more drudgery.

Today's domestic workers are faced with work that is arduous, boring and tiring. In return for doing this job they get poor wages and low status in society. In fact, often they are treated as if they were invisible, or they are taken advantage of by their employers.

Many of the women doing this work are intelligent, capable people and the puzzle is to explain why these women are working as domestic help. I have already pointed to some of the problems faced by women in today's society in chapter two. In the next chapter I shall separate the problems of class and patriarchy so as to clarify those using detail quotes from the interviews. There will also be a brief discussion of the ways the women try to cope with their situation.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 4

1. Harry Braverman LABOUR AND MONOPOLY CAPITAL Monthly Review Press New York 1974.
2. Veronica Beechey "The Sexual Division of Labour" and "The Labour Process" in. Wood (ed). THE DEGRADATION OF WORK? Hutchinson, Auckland 1982 P.54
3. Veronica Beechey "Some Notes on Female Wage Labour in Capitalist Production" CAPITAL AND CLASS No.3 1977 pp. 45-66.
4. Tony Elger "Valorisation and Deskilling : A critique of Braverman" CAPITAL AND CLASS no. 1979 pp58-99
5. For other discussions of work process see Harry Braverman "Two Comments" MONTHLY REVIEW No.28 Vol.3 1976 and R. Crompton and G. Jones WHITE COLLAR PROLETARIAT : deskilling and gender in clerical work. MacMillan London 1984.
6. See Eve Ebbert VICTORIA'S DAUGHTERS A.H. & A.W. Reed 1981 Especially Chapter 7.
7. Ann Oakley WOMEN'S WORK THE HOUSEWIFE, PAST AND PRESENT Pantheon Books Random House New York 1974 p.8.

CHAPTER FIVE : CLASS AND PATRIARCHY

I will now look at the fundamental differences between the employers and the employees as members of distinct classes and the linking of the class distinction with capitalism and patriarchy. The class distinction is defined by the relationship of each group to that which I will call 'capital'. Capital owns and controls the means of production, and also the commodity which is produced. In the case of domestic labour it is important to emphasise that the final commodity is not the cleaners' labour but the service that this labour produces. This distinction is often obscured by the complications of a domestic service situation where there is a one-to-one relationship between employer and employee. The distinction between labour and the commodity of service however, reveals the normal operation of capitalism. The cleaner has some control over the sale of her own labour but none over the final commodity; the service.

If this is unclear it is largely because, in most of the cases I am examining, the purchaser and the seller of the final commodity are one and the same capitalist. The relationship is more evident with the cases of those women working for cleaning organisations. Their labour is purchased by the organisation and then the commodity that labour produces is sold to a third party. This shows the operation of capitalism, where the commodity produced by labour that is its substance, more clearly. The relation-

ship of the women to the organisation is the same as the relationship between the women and their private employer. This examination of domestic labour as a microcosm of the normal functioning of capitalism, shows that in all cases the cleaners are in the working class while their employers are capitalists.

Because of their wealth and social power the employers have a different life-style to that of their domestic help. They are all married to men with well paid managerial or professional jobs, and many are trained professionals, themselves earning a reasonable salary. They have marketable educational qualifications and skills, which allow them to get jobs unavailable to working class women and they have husbands willing to support and help them.

The domestic helpers, however, do not have these advantages. The married domestic workers all live with men from the working class with low paying jobs. They are working to supplement the family income and, because they do not have the marketable education and professional skills, they are forced to take on cleaning as being the only thing they are qualified for.

Most of the unmarried domestic workers do have the educational qualifications to do a variety of better paid more interesting full-time jobs. They are prevented from taking up this option by the fact that they are solely responsible for their children. These women lost their

former class status when they separated from their husbands and were pushed by the need to provide for their children into accepting social welfare benefits. Their husbands, unrestricted by the requirements of children, are able to continue their careers as professionals without such disruptions. The women, however, left alone with their children have to set aside their professional careers and lower their chances of returning to their chosen field of work. This also lowers their salaries if they do manage to get back to work, as they lose seniority and chances of promotion.

Thus we can see that both groups of women, employers and employed, are pulled into their positions in society by their relationship to a male - their husband. If a woman separates from her husband she loses her class status and becomes, in many cases, a beneficiary. The married cleaners are working because their husband's wage is insufficient to support the family. They are cleaning as opposed to some other form of work, because of their lack of qualifications or skills to take on career positions. They need part-time work to combine their working lives with their responsibilities in the home, and so they turn to cleaning.

Some of the unmarried cleaners do have the educational qualifications to take other work, but their responsibilities to their children mean they cannot take full-time positions. The need to earn undeclared earnings from a part-time job (so as not to interfere with their benefits) pushes them towards domestic labour.

In this chapter I will first look at the relationship between the employer and the employee, and at the forms of the class distinction between them.

I will then look at the effect the forces of patriarchy discussed in chapter two, have on the lives of the women interviewed. These forms of patriarchy will be examined through detailed quotes taken from the interviews.

Most domestic labourers have a one-to-one relationship with their employers, similar to the situation in early New Zealand where the domestic servant was almost one of the family. Often the employer is someone known personally by the helper; for example Barbara is working for people she knows as friends.

Barbara:

It's a friend's house and the woman who's been cleaning for her has had to leave and she's a school teacher and she's flat out and she really hasn't got time to advertise and interview people

so I'm just doing it to the end of the school term mainly to help her out rather than me desperately wanting the money.

In other cases the employers are working women, or women married to professional men. In these cases the difference in life-style shows up more and can engender more antagonism from the employee. For example Susan, while explaining why one of her clients cannot do her own housework notices that despite being ill this woman is still capable of a recreational round of golf.

Susan:

These people are entertaining people, they're business people of Christchurch and they entertain a lot. She can't Hoover because of her back [pause] yet she can play golf, and she calls on us to come and do these sorts of things, you see.

Susan feels the difference in life-style, and recognises that the people she works for come from a different class to herself.

Susan:

He's retired but he likes his golf and I think he's got racehorses and the woman is [pause] no she's retired; she's home and she's got a

very sick daughter...and the other lady's a golfer and entertains a lot so it's a different, a different type [of lifestyle].

Other employers also come from the better-paid professional classes.

Debra:

I work for a city councillor and his wife. I have Tuesdays and Thursdays...working for a doctor and his wife...

Trixie:

The young couple I go to, well she could quite easily clean the house, it's not very big but she just chooses not to and I suppose, she's got a nice job, she's a model, and she also has some other type of work so she's obviously making quite a lot of money...

The paid domestic helpers are not only aware of the difference in life-style, but in some cases it can cause a certain amount of resentment.

Susan:

She was a lawyer or accountant's wife and I'm sure she could of paid me more. She was always

immaculately dressed and looked beautiful -
which got to me in the end - she couldn't give
me a little bit more, yet she could do that

Susan:

She was away at a beautician or playing squash
or being a lady in some way. I don't know what
she was doing - she'd just take off...

The employer's awareness of the class relationship
between herself and the cleaner is as often a cause of
resentment by the cleaners' as the lifestyle the employer
leads. The employer may use her control over the
cleaner's labour to degrade both the cleaner and the value
of her occupation.

Rachel:

One particular person I know, she's employed
by someone who thinks that, [pause] has the
attitude that she's [the cleaner] slightly less
of a sort of being. I think. You know, that
she's a sculley around the place. And I don't
think she'll stay long because of that.

Eleanor:

I guess the only people where you'd get the
snobbery would be those, as I say, in high
class jobs and possibly...in that sort of

situation I guess then you could become a second class citizen, but I've actually done cleaning for a lady and she went to work and she was very nice, so it depends on the people.

Occasionally the employers degrading of the cleaner reaches the stage where the domestic helper takes one of the few avenues of escape open to her - she leaves.

Trixie:

The woman was very condescending. I suppose you might expect to get that sort of attitude from a lot of people towards their housekeepers but, she was awfully snooty and she was a grubby woman as well and I didn't like her hygiene standards. I objected to them very strongly and I thought well I'm damned if I'm going to work like this for her when she's look down her nose at me so I stopped doing it.

The visibility or invisibility of class differences, therefore, can have an important bearing on each domestic worker's job, but it cannot be over-emphasised that the class difference is a real force in all cases. It is merely their awareness of it that may change. The employer is always the purchaser, and controller, of the cleaner's labour. It is not voluntary and none of the cleaners can afford to withdraw their labour without

strong provocation.

A situation where the class difference is largely invisible is when the employer is ill or disabled. Because, in these cases, the employer/patient is clearly unable to perform the housework themselves, class antagonisms of the type I have just discussed seldom arise. Because of the employer/patient's disability their domestic help is paid for by the state. It is this that is largely responsible for the invisibility of the class relationship. Because the employer/patient is not herself the purchaser of the cleaner's labour the relationship appears different to the employer-worker relationship I have discussed. The working hours and conditions are, however, set by the employer/patient, who takes on all the characteristics of an employer except for actually being the source of payment. The employer/patient may also be from a working-class background herself, and all these factors tend to mask the visibility of the employment relationship.

In the cases where the class distinction is largely invisible close personal contact often causes the cleaners to identify with the needs of their employers. For example, Barbara enjoys knowing that she is relieving her employer of the burden of housework, and this raises her level of job satisfaction.

Barbara:

I usually feel good because I think, because I know all the women I am working for I think oh good Josie will be pleased when she comes home and sees the place is clean and she doesn't have to worry.

The invisibility of a class difference also allows an empathy to develop between the cleaner and the employer. Here the cleaner can actually imagine herself in the employer's position having her own housework done for her, a phenomena that is clearly unlikely where a visible class distinction exists.

Rachel:

I actually think it's quite satisfying because, you know, I like to think of someone coming and doing that to my place, clean the toilets and that sort of clean up.

Eleanor even identifies so closely with her employer/patient that she will work on public holidays so they don't have to sit in a dirty house for another week.

Eleanor:

I have put myself out on some occasions when it has been, one lady in particular, it's been say a

Labour Day which is a Monday and normally her day is a Monday unfortunately for her because she misses out, if it's a holiday you know, so sometimes I put myself out to go back and actually do the place if I'm going to be out on a Monday because they're living in that same mess every week as the place gets dirtier. I know myself I can only stand this place when it gets so bad and it's got to be done. And sitting there and thinking well if you didn't have the energy to do it you'd have to sit there and look at it. And it must be terribly frustrating for my patients to think oh, if only I could get out of this chair I could do that. So looking at it from their point of view...I know they appreciate it being done because they can't do it for themselves.

The women can also identify with their employers needs because of their own previous experience of being in the same position as their employer. Debra, for example, is aware of the loneliness of being a mother trapped at home with only the children for company because of her own experience with this situation.

Debra:

I get a lovely break, well I have morning tea, ten minutes or so and even then if you're chatting away it could be longer. I find most of these women love company too. See, they're sort of stranded in a house, I can remember those days,

they love a chat.

Barbara and Rachel can remember their time trying to combine a career with a role of wife and mother, and hence can identify with the problems experienced by their employers who are also trying to combine those two demanding roles.

Rachel:

I get satisfaction out of that cause I've worked myself, when I've had kids and I know what it's like. I know, I can just picture what she must have felt like in the weekends, you know. I mean the hassles, I had the same hassles with my husband, you know he'd say what's the problem? Why does it need to be done? and I can see that that's what she's, she would of had. Whether in the weekends she spent most of her weekend cleaning up after a male because they just...don't take any responsibility for it.

Barbara:

I can remember what it was like various times when I've worked full time. You'd go flat out all week [and] you're away from early in the morning 'til early evening and you rush home and get the dinner on and do the few basics and you spend half your weekend cleaning and never get a rest.

This identification with the employer stems, in large part, from their shared female experience. Most women

understand the problems of trying to combine a family life and a working life because most women have tried to do this. The shared gender means employer-employee relations are usually fairly cordial. Often the employee leaves if she is not happy with her situation, this will be discussed later as a method of coping with the problem of being a woman in a capitalist-patriarchal society. All the women recommend their present employers as being friendly, nice people who treat their domestic helpers very well. Trixie, for example, points out that her employers treat her as a friend rather than as some-one who works for them. One couple in particular have been very generous to her.

Trixie:

She's so good to me in other ways. She gave me her...sewing machine and we can go and stay at this farmhouse that they've got whenever we like. And it's beautiful and well equipped and it's got everything and the kids love it. Mind you I always do a massive clean-up job on the place but that's not part of the deal. I mean she probably thinks well Trixie will clean the place up, but she doesn't expect me to...and you know she's just been so good she gave me a typewriter, mind you she's got two others but, she's given me some

clothes and I wouldn't wear just any old clothes but, you know, some nice things. A really lovely sports style jacket...and you know she's good like that.

Of course this 'generosity' is all in ways that the employer can very easily afford or is getting something in return for, such as a clean farmhouse to stay in, and giving away a typewriter when she owns three. Despite this, though, the generosity does contribute to Trixie's welfare and thus is enjoyed by her.

Even though relations on the whole are cordial, still it is an employer-employee relationship and as such it does embody a certain amount of conflict. One area of concern to the paid domestic workers is the amount of work they are expected to do. Often employers will leave impossibly long lists, usually as a way of making sure the domestic worker keeps working steadily for the whole time. This not only implies a lack of trust in the domestic worker, but it also annoys her as she knows she is putting in as much effort as she possibly can.

Trixie:

And...it's just not possible to get everything done. She's more inclined to do that if she

goes out so I think she just wants to keep me busy, although she must know by now that I keep working all the time because I couldn't possibly get everything done if I didn't. Yes, usually when she goes out she leaves me a list of things that I know damn well that I'm not going to get done.

Trixie:

Sometimes it's sort of unrealistic, like I might you know, with Millie I work set times and she might say, will you do the bath and something else and something else and something else today and, you know, it's not [possible]. I get a bit annoyed about that...

Coral, working in a hospital for a cleaning firm, is the only domestic worker who doesn't have cordial relations with her employers. The firm pushes its workers to do more and more work in less time, and its policy is to try continually to get more work done by fewer people. They thus improve their profit margin by decreasing the wages bill but maintaining their level of output.

Coral:

If I leave they can get in a three hourly and put some of my work onto somebody else, and re-arrange

it. They're re-arranging the whole time so that you don't know if you're replacing somebody if you've got more work. Which you will of done, you will of gained, they'll want something, you know, a bit done in less time.

And when the women tried to discuss their working conditions and the new shifts they had great difficulty getting any help at all from the firm's representatives.

Coral:

We had a big meeting last week...they called in the weekend workers, the night staff and the day staff and he would not give an answer to anything. I asked him...if anybody would be treated like we were when the contract came up last time, he wouldn't budge an inch. He wouldn't give us any answers at all...so it was really a waste of time... all he would say is if it's getting too hot in the kitchen well out you go.

The excessive demands of private employers can also reach the stage where they can lead to conflict.

Trixie:

The only one I ever have any objections about... is my sister-in-law...sometimes her attitude towards me when she knows she's getting her money's

worth out of me, you know sort of stretching me a bit, that annoys me. Pointing out different things that I might not have done like, oh stupid things that I'd probably not even do for myself.

Francine:

She's the only one that doesn't leave a list so I tend to try and do everything I possibly can in that three hours so she can't try and make me feel I haven't done enough or haven't done what she would like me to do.

Sometimes the conflict can be subdued and down-played. For example, Francine explains how she communicates with her employer. Neither of them will actually say she is dissatisfied with the other, but they do write each other notes.

Francine:

She'll leave a note like 'usual cleaning and ironing please.'..which tells me nothing really and if she puts a little cryptic note then I'll put a cryptic note and so it goes on.

Other times the conflict can be very open - but this usually only applies to women working within a firm. The one-to-one relationship that exists between employer

and worker in a domestic household means that if the conflict is permitted to become open the working situation will become impossible and the worker would leave herself or be asked to leave. Therefore Coral's experiences with her firm are not repeated in any way by the women working for other women within a home.

Coral:

They're ruthless, they don't care, you're just a number to them so you sort of learn after a while not to make waves and they don't notice you and you just box on...I don't think they've got a very good reputation for staff relations at all.

The close one-to-one relationship can mean the cleaner is pushed into doing things she doesn't really want to, and doesn't feel she needs to do. For example Susan doesn't like doing extra hours to help spring clean, however she is pressured into it by her personal relationship with her employer.

Susan:

Why do I do it? Cause I suppose they know me and I know them. To keep your job I suppose isn't it? Like the elderly lady wants me to wash her ceilings down...I don't even like

stretching and cleaning my own ceiling. Oh why do I do it? I don't know just because she's elderly, I feel sorry for her and know she can't do it herself I suppose.

Barbara also allows herself to be talked into working when she doesn't really want to because her employers are also friends and this personal relationship pressures her into the work.

Barbara:

The main reason I'm keeping it up now is because the three little jobs I'm doing are all for people I know well and they're really busy too... and I know that they haven't got time to hunt around and find someone else to clean.

In conclusion, then, we can say that the most distinguishing characteristic of the employer-employee relationship in domestic labour is its one-to-one nature. The employer and employee know each other on a personal level and this has a number of repercussions for the worker.

The one to one relationship of employer to cleaner, which is essentially the same as the master-servant relationship of the past, tends to amplify the visibility

of the class distinction as I have shown. The less visible this distinction is the more satisfied the domestic labourers appear to be with the conditions of their work. That this can develop into empathy with the employer is because of the common experience of both as women who work all day and then try to cope with the demands of a house and family in the evenings and weekends.

Despite this close connection, the relationship is an employer-employee one and as such must involve a certain amount of class conflict. Sometimes the employer has unrealistic expectations which causes the employee to feel used. Sometimes, too, the one-to-one relationship can put pressure on the worker to try to meet the employer's needs and expectations even when it means doing extra work. In most cases the conflict had to be deliberately subdued because otherwise the work situation would become unbearable for the employee. The only time the conflict is permitted to develop in a more open way is a situation where the one-to-one characteristic doesn't apply. An example of this is women working for a firm where they deal with a hierarchy of representatives of the firm. In this case the firm has an openly exploitive policy towards its employees. Because there is no one employer and no one-to-one personal relationship the

firm can get away with a policy like this.

So the one-to-one character of employer-employee relations can work in the employees favour by putting some pressure on the employer to make working conditions fairly tolerable. However, it can also work against the employees interested by pushing her to do extra work to meet the employers expectations, because of these extra-economic forms of coercion.

In some cases the reason some women identify closely with their employer is, as I said, the fact that some of them have the same qualifications and were once professional working women themselves. The puzzle, then, is to explain why those well-educated women are involved in cleaning other people's houses. In the chapter on the nature of domestic labour I described the work as dirty, tiring and with numerous disadvantages attached. So why do women choose this job above any other form of employment?

I have already shown, in chapter two, that women do not, in fact, choose a form of employment, but are pushed into certain areas by the system of capitalist patriarchy. This system is the force which pushes women in a certain direction. The women, themselves give a variety of reasons for doing this work, and these reasons are the forms of a patriarchal society. For example, one of the

major reasons the women give for choosing to do domestic labour is the fact that they have the necessary skills. They have these skills because they have been trained since early childhood and have always kept a house. This early training is the beginning of the patriarchal influence over women's lives.

Debra:

It's very simple because you've been doing it at home for years so you know exactly what other people want, so it's just no problem. It's more or less like working in my house.

Debra:

It's probably because I can do it quite well, you know there's certain things in your life like, I'm not a good knitter so I could never go to a factory and do knitting. I never had a great education, I couldn't go into an office or anything unless I went back to school. This is a job I find I can do well. I find I can do it very quickly at home. I can clean the house, I can organise the children and it's never been a bother to me so when I saw those ads. I thought well that's a job I can do - I'd have no bother and I was very confident about it.

Rachel:

Oh yes, I'm pretty accustomed to housework.

The early training also made some of the women simply accept housework as women's work, although they felt the need for more recognition for doing the job.

Barbara:

It makes you realise just how much work women do, you know. And we don't even, we just think oh this has to be done, we don't even think of it as work half the time 'cause somebody has to do it and it's usually you if you're a female.

Of course not all the women have high educational qualifications. The problem for those who don't is that they have no alternative to housework. These women have spent a large proportion of their time and energy keeping a house and caring for children, so they don't have the opportunity to gather up qualifications. This, then, explained the fact that women tend to be found in low skilled occupations. For the women in this study, the lack of qualifications means they turn to the one job they are qualified for - housework.

Eleanor:

I mean the jobs are few and far between unless you've got qualifications or something

behind you. Without that you're lost, there's only factory work.

Debra:

If you're at home you do the same thing over and over, you've got to know what you like. See cleaning just suits me, there's not much else I could do.

Some of the women do have experience in other jobs, which they would rather be doing. However in most cases they can't do these jobs because they would interfere with what the women see as their responsibilities to their families. The importance of these responsibilities isolates these women in their families, as they were isolated in early New Zealand society. Again, this isolation allows patriarchy to be a major influence in the lives of these women. Patriarchy forces the women into accepting the major responsibility for child care and housework.

Susan:

I've waitressed out at Brevet, I've waitressed there. But that's night work again...but I loved it cause I always felt as though I'd had a night out too y'know.

Francine:

It's easier to do cleaning at the moment because of commitments with the children. I'd like to get a job, you know maybe next year. I'd like another postie job actually. That suited me down to the ground.

Several of the solo mothers not only have experience in other work but also have the qualifications to do much more interesting, and better paid, work. But because they are alone with their children, they have no-one to help with child-care, and so are pushed by their gender into domestic labour.

Barbara:

I was a nurse before I was before and after I was married. And then I continued part-time nursing after my son was born, part-time in the evenings and my husband would be there to look after him.

Rachel:

Well, I'm a trained teacher and I hope to go back but it could be doubtful. I'm going to do some relieving next year and see if I can get back in because they tell me I need some recent experience.

Most of the women who do not have these qualifications missed out on them when they were young and now are trapped in their roles of wife, mother and part-time cleaner.

Eleanor:

I'd always wanted to be a hairdresser, even when I was a teenager. But the opportunities didn't crop up at the right time so I took up shop work instead.

Coral:

I even looked a few weeks ago at being an occupational therapist aid. I wish I'd known a few years ago about occupational therapy and I could of done training then. I think that would of suited me down to the ground that sort of thing.

The responsibilities of the wife mother role weigh heavily with these women. One of the big advantages, explain the women, is the fact that cleaning is flexible, the hours can be changed and can always be arranged to fit in with children going to school, attending sports and allowing time for the women to do their own housework.

Debra:

I'm home when they come home, I'm home when my husband comes in and even though they're

totally unselfish I feel as though if you're out working you should really organise it so that your family don't suffer too much, there's still their needs. They've got to have a hot meal. I mean Keith gets up at six in the morning and he gets home at five at night. I don't feel he should come in and do potatoes and things you know. I should be able to work in my time away with my time at home, and I do it, so the hours are very important.

Debra gets up shortly after her husband, works as a cleaner and child-minder for three hours every morning, then returns to her own home and works 'til after the evening meal. She is exhausted by seven in the evening.

Coral:

It's got to fit around the family, you know, I've got three children and any jobs that I've, well I've cleaned for the last eight years and I've done it in times where it least affects the family.

Even when the women work for organisations such as the Nurse Maude the work is still flexible enough to allow women time off if they need it for their children. In fact the Nurse Maude Organisation protects its workers from complaints by patients when they need time off to cope with sick children.

Eleanor:

She'd spent quite a bit of time at home with her kids, and they said well look, you know, the patient complained and they said well look I'm sorry but, you know, she's got children and there's nothing she can do about it. If you've got to take time off to be with kids well you've just got to take time off with kids, and that's all there is about it, it's a very good job apparently as far as having children goes.

For the women working within a one-to-one relationship the friendliness of their employers means they can easily get time off if it should be needed.

Francine:

Well most people are quite understanding, like I've rung up, like I've got a Friday morning job and something's come up so I've just rung and said well look something's come up do you mind if I come on Wednesday instead, or Thursday, and most people have sort of said, they find it o.k. as long as it gets done thoroughly once a week.

Trixie:

Sometimes I might go and say well I can only work three hours for you today, you know, if I've got

commitments with the kids or something like that, so its a fairly flexible arrangement that I've got with everyone that I work for.

Family commitments often prevented the women choosing to go into different careers, as these would not have been flexible enough to allow them to have time off if it was needed.

Coral:

I could have gone back to office work but I don't think, the hours are longer, not very many, you know, sort of part-time office work available, also not many people, bosses, don't like women with young children where they're often sick. This is where this has been all right.

Trixie:

Unexpectedly I've got custody of my fourteen almost fifteen year-old son this year, and he's been living with his Dad for eight years in Australia so I've thought since he arrived that perhaps I wouldn't like to go into full employment, you know 'til he's been here a couple of years, you know, because he's obviously feeling a bit insecure about everything for a number of years and I don't want to be a working mother just yet until he is sort of on his feet.

These women explain that they enjoy the flexibility of the job because it means they can please themselves when they work. However, in truth, they adapt their working times to suit their family's needs rather than their own.

Susan:

If we're going away. Perhaps Sunday drive or going out for a picnic on a Sunday I'll get there really early. And sometimes I go out there at night time if may be there's sport on with the children or something's on early morning that I can't get out there. I vary it to suit myself.

However, while the flexibility of cleaning arrangements can seem to fit the cleaner's own requirements, it may not provide the freedom it seems to. For example Trixie first took it up because it fitted in with her studies at university, but later she found she was adapting her university work to fit with her cleaning jobs.

Trixie:

Another thing that attracted me when I first started was that it fitted in with university although when I first started doing Mrs Smith's I was only doing Liberal Studies but it meant that I could do that. And when I started organising what I was going to do the following

year I'd think now does that fit in with my housework jobs?

Eleanor was also trying to do some courses and found she was restricted by her job. Yet this is the same organisation that will leap to the defence of a woman with children who needs to take time off when the children are ill.

Eleanor:

You have to be careful. I wanted to take some time off to go to a course and it was two mornings a week and she said unless you can do those mornings in another time you might as well give the job away, and I thought, help, I don't want to do that so you have to be careful. Unless it was something to do with the job...if it was going to St John's to learn first aid, they might be a bit lenient there, but it is a bit limiting if you want to learn more.

Evidently the job makes more time available if it is needed for the women to fulfil the traditional wife/mother role than if it is needed for other reasons. Domestic labour, therefore, appears to be flexible but in reality it is still limiting and restrictive.

An important motivation for the women working at all is the fact that they need the money. The married women tend to view their wages as 'extra', an addition to the family wage earned by their husbands. The solo

mothers also regard their wages as extra to the benefit which meets all their more immediate needs. Because of the common patriarchal assumption that women work for pin money while males support women and children, the women try to play down the importance of their earnings by claiming it is extra. However, often they also admit that the 'extra' money is essential for their family survival.

Susan:

Most of it is just to, for the family to exist and get the type of living we want to live I suppose. Cause, you see, we built here, my husband and I built this and it took us about two years, and (pause) I don't know it's just to, I suppose it's just a wee bit of extra money to exist.

Barbara:

...rather than me desperately needing the money, but the money will still be handy, like we've been, oh I don't want to sound damn pathetic, but we've been so poor for so long that there are an awful lot of things that, we need to build up on, like I can't remember when I last had much in the way of new clothes for example and, you know Paul needs new undies, there's lots of little things. I want to take out some more insurance.

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To some people clothing and insurance would be basic necessities rather than 'extras'. Many of the women who are solo parents have a similar attitude to Barbara. They regard rent and food as the basic needs, and anything else is 'extra'.

Rachel:

I find it handy to have that extra bit of money, it sort of caters for my, you know, extra needs really. The benefit that I get caters for rent and food, and anything extra I can use that for.

Barbara:

If I do keep up this one little job it won't be for essential things, it'll be for things like, I'd like to buy my son a bike and...I don't own my own car any more.

To most families a car is an essential, especially if it's needed for a worker. Because Barbara is female and trapped into taking part-time work to combine her role as breadwinner with that of mother she has her mobility restricted, which in turn makes her working life that much harder. Some of the women decry their earnings as non-essential, then admit that it is needed each week.

Trixie tries to make a distinction between money she doesn't depend upon but at the same time it is money she really needs.

Trixie:

Well I, I don't depend on it but I don't know what I'd do without it quite frankly and I really, I need it...

The married women admit more easily that the money is an essential addition. In some cases this is very probably to overcome husband's objections to their wives working. It is more difficult for a husband to object if he knows the reason for his wife working is the fact that he isn't bringing home enough money to cope with the needs of his family.

Francine:

My husband's a builder so, depending on, the job he's got may be a contract so he won't get paid 'til he's finished that job. So in the interim the money I get pays for our food, so it's necessary you see.

Debra:

There was no choice, I had to work. I had to find work. I was quite confident I'd find it but to support, you know. One wage, my husband's

wage isn't [pause] wasn't quite sufficient.

Susan:

My husband didn't like me working. He hated it. Said a woman's place is in the home, but I think when he realised that I was bringing in a little bit to get the things we wanted then he didn't mind. As long as it didn't interfere with the children. And he's accepted my cleaning but I don't think he likes me cleaning but perhaps the money's, we've got the odd holiday and just things we wouldn't of had I suppose.

In some cases the women had started cleaning because of a temporary financial crisis and were planning to either give it up entirely or severely reduce the hours they worked. This is also a typical feature of women in the work force, they only work to cover an immediate crisis but do not regard paid working as a major part of their lives, or as something they intend to have a long-term commitment to. In one case the 'temporary arrangement' has lasted over eight years.

Coral:

That dresser made me go out to clean. I bought that and Christmas caught up with me and I couldn't pay for it so I thought well I'll go out to work

just to pay for that, and that was eight years ago.

Barbara:

It's only a temporary thing until I finish at university. I've never looked at it as a full-time occupation although I have done cleaning years ago as a full time occupation.

Many of the women, especially the solo mothers are looking at cleaning as a temporary measure until they are more free to take up some other, more rewarding occupation.

Trixie:

I thought I would look for some sort of a job. I mean that was a realistic sort of an idea a few years ago and I thought when Mary gets to High School I'd look for something else to do.

Rachel:

Well I haven't committed myself to anything more really cause I see it as a temporary thing, and I really do want to get back to teaching. And I want a full employment job because, you, know, I mean you're so limited on the domestic purposes benefit, financially in what you can do. Also I'm sick of being at home.

Many of these solo mothers are hampered in their search for work by the fact that they are on a benefit. Cleaning is one of the few jobs which is paid 'under the table'. The women, then don't have to declare the income they receive and thus avoid the problems which declaring an income can cause beneficiaries. Most of them find the extra money keeps their family above mere subsistence level. It is a way for them to get around being 'snookered by the system' which penalises people for earning too much. This is a difficult point as there obviously has to be a point where money earned has to come off a benefit received from the state. However, taking money off the benefit forced the women into cheating the system so they could do something for themselves to raise their standards of living. Declaring an income of any description led to problems with their benefits for all these women. As Rachel said they simply can't afford to do part-time work.

Rachel:

I've done some relieving and I had, I declared that and I mean as soon as you declare it there is quite a lot of hassles because that, especially with something like relieving cause there's so many options you can do. One you can go off your benefit, if you're earning over the \$1,300 you can go off the benefit and then there's all the hassles of getting back on it which take a while.

So you may have a week, I mean you get paid for that week eventually but you may have a week when you've got no money coming in. The only thing you can do is to earn the amount and when you go over the amount they deduct it, start deducting it off your benefit which means that you could work for a whole week and, you know, at various times of the year. And earn over it, and then for the next few months you'd be, have a less benefit...so it's all a bit of a hassle.

On a benefit many women suffer a severe downturn in the standard of living they were used to when they were married. This is another problem of being on the benefit which is alleviated by taking 'under the table' work.

Trixie:

Well to give me the standard of living that most of the people I know have, and that I might of had had I stayed in a marriage where these things were sort of, came as a matter of course. But you know I think that, once you get into the situation where you are a beneficiary that you're not supposed to have all those things that other people accept as a matter of course.

We can see, then, that these women are under a variety of pressures pushing them into domestic labour.

Many of them have the skills necessary for this type of work and are confident of their abilities in this field. At the same time they lack the qualifications necessary for alternative employment. Cleaning jobs have the flexibility required to reconcile working with the female role of wife and mother. Financially these women have to work to contribute to the family income and without their contribution the family would not survive. At the same time, however, the women tend to regard their earnings as 'extra' money rather than as an integral part of the family income. Sometimes the jobs are taken on as a temporary measure, and become a permanent part of the women's lives. However, the temporary label enables the women and their families to regard the work as an addition, rather than a major part of these women's lives. It also helps reconcile both parties to a woman working where this may not yet have the same degree of legitimacy that males working have. Cleaning, too, enables women on a benefit to supplement their incomes without being penalised for this. Finally, in a tight labour market situation, where men get the first priority for jobs, housework is one job men do not want, that will always be available to women who need to work.

Despite all this, domestic labour is still an unpleasant job, and the women are pushed into it by the capitalist-patriarchal society they live in. Although

the women do try to make their lives a little easier in a variety of ways, organisation and unionisation have not been part of this. Working women have historically been less able to organise and fight against poor working conditions and low wages than men. Women have to perform so much unpaid labour, in the form of housework and child-care, outside the paid work place that they have no time to attend union meetings and organise. Female dominated unions are not usually militant and often do not even use women as delegates.

Unions with a predominantly female membership are regarded as weaker than male dominated ones such as freezing workers, waterside workers or construction workers. Even in the unions which are mainly female, the delegates do not often send women to the bargaining tables.

In 'Trade Unions in New Zealand' Roth comments that in 1972 the Federation of Labour delegates from clothing, laundry and tobacco workers unions (which have mainly women members) were all men, and there were only 12 women among the 263 delegates at the Federation of Labour Conference. Only one woman has ever been elected to the National Executive of the F.O.L. ¹ Roth adds that strikes by females are unusual...

One of the big problems for domestic workers is the isolation of the job, which does not provide the support needed to organise a fight to improve conditions. Ruth Cavendish notes, in her experience of striking factory

workers, that it is the shared experience which brought the women together and made it possible for them to take strike action in an effort to improve their position. She points out that the first step to organise the action was a meeting held at the place of work. Domestic workers are isolated by their places of work and hence are even less likely to take definite action to improve their situation.

'Involvement in the dispute showed that the women were more likely to take action on their own behalf at work than outside. Here they were brought together daily under the same conditions and had a collective awareness of being exploited. The first step in organising was to call a meeting at the back of the line - it's much harder to know where to begin organising outside of work where women are more isolated from one another. The solidarity that grew out of the shared experience ^{is} what gave the women strength and self-confidence.'

Coral discovered the difficulties of working in an isolated situation when she tried to get support from some of the other cleaners in the hospital to help her in her struggle with their employers. Because the other cleaners did not know her, and had no feeling of collective exploitation, they did not support her in her struggle.

The isolation of domestic labour, then, means that women involved in this type of work have to either learn to cope alone, put up with the situation, or leave. The interviewed women use all three of these methods of coping, but the most popular is, by far, the last. The

most common response to the question "What would you do if you were having trouble with your employer"? is "I would just leave".

Trixie:

Oh yeah, I'd just tell them to stick it.

It is taken for granted that leaving is the proper response to a troublesome job, in fact some of the women had already put this solution into practice.

Trixie:

I thought well I'm damned if I'm going to work like this for her when she's looking down her nose at me so I stopped doing it.

Susan:

I asked for more money and she couldn't - she said she couldn't afford it so I didn't go back.

One or two women were self confident enough to try to talk things over before deciding to leave:

Francine:

I'd talk about it with them, I wouldn't just leave. I'd try to sort it out, you know, communicate about it and find what their

expectation was and what the problem was...
then if they weren't satisfied or I wasn't
satisfied then I'd leave sure.

But most of them feel that, with other jobs easy to
find, they would rather leave than face a confrontation.

Debra:

I'd just leave, I wouldn't try to talk it through
because, you know, I think we're very lucky in
what we do. There's loads of jobs around, more
women seem to need people these days...

And if another job isn't immediately available,
then the women will simply do without until another
turns up:

Trixie:

It wouldn't worry me. I'd just do without that
one, you know. I've done without a lot less
before so I could do it again. No it wouldn't
worry me. I wouldn't work for someone if they
were being objectionable in any way.

For the most part other jobs are fairly readily
available, through the same web of personal contacts which
was used to contact the women themselves. Many of the

interviewees had got their first jobs through word-of-mouth and all feel they could easily get more work, or a replacement for a job they had left by this means.

Debra:

I think it would be very easy for me to do it by word of mouth this time...home help is in such, there's quite a demand now, a lot of even young mothers want to go out and work now.

Many women look for support, not from other women in the same job, but from neighbouring women or family. Often other women living close or family can help a working woman organise her home life so that it is not quite so restricting and they can manage more hours of work.

Francine:

I've got very good friends and they've all got children and I'd just leave her with them, you know. There's a group of us living around here and we all try to help out when we can by looking after each other's children.

Eleanor:

My sister's always said well I could always send her out to her place, and she has got friends round the neighbourhood...

Often, too, the members of the close nuclear family can relieve the pressure of home maintenance which allows the mother more time for her job.

Susan:

The children make their own beds each morning and they have to dust their rooms once a week and, I often get them to help me clean, perhaps do a wee bit of Hoovering if I haven't done it and they take it in turns doing dishes so...we all must help out.

The second most common method of dealing with a housework situation is to learn to accept it. All women do housework in their own homes and have learnt to handle the worst aspects of this job. All the women interviewed have been doing housework for many years, so they are used to the hard, boring nature of the work.

Francine:

I don't think many women would say they like doing housework, but it's just something you have to do....I suppose I've been doing it for years so I'm reasonably good at it...I don't find it hard, but I don't like it particularly.

Many of the domestic servants have developed a method of 'switching off' their minds and doing the work

without dwelling on its true nature. Trixie refers to this as 'automatic pilot'.

Trixie:

It's not something that you particularly enjoy...
it's the sort of thing you do as a matter of
course without thinking about it...it might not be
what you'd like to do but you don't really think
a great deal about it sort of like, you do it
automatically.

Women are used to housework, and have, in most cases
developed an attitude of acceptance because to fight alone
is impossible and organisation is very difficult to arrange
because of the isolated nature of the work. A philosophical
attitude to the alternative to a hernia, for example Susan
says:

Susan:

Sometimes here I can Hoover and clean and get
everything looking lovely and the kids come home
and everything's higgeldy-piggeldy - but I think
that's housework.

Fighting back against an unreasonable employer is a
possible reaction, but it only occurs in a few cases, and
the fighting is on a low level so the employer will not
notice that all their demands are not being carried out.

Coral describes doing enough work to make it look as though all the employer's demands have been met, when in fact there isn't time to complete all the tasks she is supposed to do.

Coral:

That's not my pidgeon, I have to skimp on something else - you get quite cunning as to what you can get away with and what has to be done so that they know that you've been there.

Francine refuses outright to obey all the demands of her employer by finding an easier way to do the work. Because she is not supervised she can do this and not have to face a confrontation with her employer on the issue.

Francine:

She prefers that you get down on your hands and knees and do her floor, but I don't. I always take my squeegee mop and make sure I do an extra, make sure I do it thoroughly, but I don't see why I should have to get on my hands and knees to do her floor, but I do a thorough job.

On the whole, then, all the women have learnt to accept that patriarchy exerts an overwhelming force on their lives. They realise they do not have sufficient power to change this force in any fundamental way, and hence they have schooled themselves to cope with their situation in a number of subtle ways. These methods of coping, however, can only improve these women's lives in small ways. The major determinant of patriarchy still exists and still controls women living in today's capitalist-patriarchal society.

1. Judith Aitken A WOMAN'S PLACE? *A study of the changing role of women in New Zealand* Heinemann Educational Books 1975
New Edition 1980 P.69.
2. Ruth Cavendish WOMEN ON THE LINE Routedledge and Kegan Paul
London, Boston and Henly 1982 P.165.

CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have discussed the effects of capitalist-patriarchy on women living in today's society and I have described the nature of women's work through detailed quotes from women involved in paid domestic work. Finally, I looked at the women's struggle to cope with the forces of capitalist-patriarchy.

The influence of capitalism developing in a patriarchal society is to push women more and more into an inferior position. To show this I have examined the transition from a feudal, patriarchal society to a capitalist-patriarchal society. In the feudal society women were relatively free-although they were unable to participate in the important political decision making institutions such as the church and the state. However, as capitalism developed it used and altered patriarchy to serve its own ends, to the detriment of the freedom and independence of women.

This transition, so aptly described by British feminist writers did not transport itself to New Zealand in its original form.

New Zealand was a settler society which imported the capitalist-patriarchy from the mother country, but which did not have a history of a feudal society to look back to.

This means there are certain crucial differences between British capitalist-patriarchy and the system in New Zealand. The most important of these differences is that women in a feudal society lived and worked in an environment of extremely close personal contact. Much of this personal contact survived the transition to capitalism in Britain. However, in the settler society the women did not have this history of contact and so were more isolated from each other. Also, the vast tracts of land between homesteads in the very early colonial society meant the women could not make contact without a great deal of time and effort.

In feudal society the family was a self-supporting unit and every member contributed to its survival, including the women. As capitalism developed women and children were the first workers because they were cheaper to hire, and more docile workers. Once men were hired their wages were not high enough to support a family, because the value of labour had been lowered by the use of cheap female workers. The result of these low wages was to keep women in some form of paid labour so as to contribute to the family's income.

In the New Zealand settler society, labour was scarce and commanded a higher price. This meant males could

support a family on their own and married women did not work at all. Unmarried women worked, usually as domestic servants, until they married and became isolated in the nuclear family. This isolation meant that patriarchy could gain a strong foothold in New Zealand, and the women were made totally dependent on their husbands.

This pattern has only recently been broken down by the need of capital for a new source of cheap labour. The lowering of the male wage has meant that more and more married women are being forced to accept waged work outside the home.

The pressures of a strong patriarchy have meant that these women are overwhelmingly pushed into part-time work. Women's sole responsibility for the care and maintenance of their families, and the patriarchy which dictates that all men should have an unpaid servant in their homes to wait on them does not leave the women enough time or energy for full-time paid work.

Women's work in today's society is characterised, not only by its part-time nature, but also by the fact that it is low-paid, low status and insecure. These characteristics arise because most women do not have the qualifications for better work, or find they are unable to use their qualifications because of their responsibilities

in the home. Women involved in paid domestic labour are illustrative of the position of women in a capitalist-patriarchal society. However, in certain respects, the position of these women differs from that of most women in waged work. Domestic workers in the private sphere have a special one-to-one relationship with their employers which can affect their working lives. They are not protected by a trade union, which means they are more vulnerable to exploitation. In the face of intolerable working conditions their only viable response is to leave. If the situation is not absolutely impossible the women will cope with it in a variety of small ways, or will simply talk themselves into accepting it as inevitable.

Domestic labour is boring, dirty, degrading work which in general is not enjoyed by the women involved in it. Many of them cope with this by telling themselves that it is a 'means to an end' and by doing the work automatically. The nature of women's domestic work, paid or unpaid, is revealed in the words of the women actually involved in the situation. These words also provide a graphic first-hand description of the forms of capitalist-patriarchy in the every day lives of women working today.

One of the major conclusions which can be drawn from this study is that capitalism and patriarchy are related

and that it is this relationship which explains the current position of working women, especially working women with families, in today's society. Women tend to get their class identification from their relationships to a male. Women married to high earning professional males are in a privileged position and are able to use that privilege to improve their personal life-styles. They are able to free themselves to some degree from the forces of patriarchy, which insist it is their duty to care for and maintain the family, by hiring someone to take some of the burden of their domestic labour off them. This, however, means these women are buying their independence at the expense of working class women who do not enjoy the same privileged position.

These working-class women, unable to escape the difficulties of being female in a capitalist-patriarchal society, are pushed into trying to combine waged work with the commitments of a family. Their situation is made worse by the fact that the waged work they do is unskilled, boring and dirty.

The combination of capitalism and patriarchy does contain some contradictions. For example the needs of capital dictate that women are useful producers and would be more profitable to capital if they were working in

factories, rather than in separate homes. However, this could make women materially independent of men, and they would therefore not provide the ready servants required by patriarchy. At the present moment, the system has met the problem by employing women, at low wages, and often on a part-time basis. This means they are working and therefore producing to meet the needs of capital, but their wages are not at a level sufficient to ensure material independence. Whether this situation will last will depend, to some extent, on women working and the degree to which they agitate for a change. As women join the paid work force in greater numbers, the discrepancy between their position and that of their husbands will become increasingly obvious. Even now, as more middle class, qualified women continue their careers after marriage the system of patriarchy is beginning to break down as more husbands realise they need their wife's wage and that if she is to continue to earn it the housework will have to be more evenly divided. The danger, however, is that rather than share the housework, both husband and wife will opt to hire a houseworker. There is a high possibility that this houseworker will be a working class female, and thus the equality of the middle class women would have been bought at the expense of another woman. This woman would find herself trapped into a low status job which doesn't give her independence because it is low paid, but which she is forced to accept in order to ensure her own and her family's well-being. Thus, the

system of capitalist-patriarchy will continue to exist
unless there is drastic and far-reaching social change.

HOUSEWORK

Here lies a poor woman who was always tired,
She lived in a house where help wasn't hired:
Her last words on earth were: 'Dear friends,
I am going
To where there's no cooking, or washing, or
sewing,
For everything there is exact to my wishes,
For where they don't eat there's no washing
of dishes.
I'll be where loud anthems will always be
ringing,
But having no voice I'll be quit of the
singing.
Don't mourn for me now, don't mourn for me
never,
I am going to do nothing for ever and ever'.

(Anonymous)

Source : WOMEN Eileen McConnell
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